Inside:

- Ethereal sci-fi environments
- **Bright and bold game concepts**
- Folklore inspired illustrations
- **Creating elaborate imaginary worlds**
- Sketching quick tips
- **Speed paint mystical earth magic**
- and much more!

Editor's Letter

ANNIE MOSS
Editor

2dartist is now on Instagram!

Welcome to *2dartist* issue 136!

Sadly *2dartist* is coming to an end but the final issue is full of brilliant features! Read interviews with Ismail Inceoglu, and Maximilian Degan, peek in the sketchbook of Waiji Choo and get quick tips on sketching by Sylwia Bomba. Illustrator Nataša Ilinčić also showcases her folklore inspired works.

Peter Goethe and Alex Olmedo share their speed painting techniques, and Matt Smith explains anatomy of the human head. James Wolf Strehle continues his Fantasy Fundamentals series, and Mingchen Shen demonstrates his use of light effects.

On behalf of the *2dartist* team, thank you to our readers for your support and to all of the great artists who have graced the pages of *2dartist* over the years.

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Maximilian Degan is a thirty-one year old concept artist and illustrator, born and raised in Berlin, currently residing in sunny Sydney. Currently he works from home on various freelance projects.
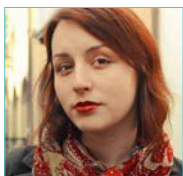
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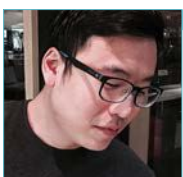
WAIJI CHOO
Drawn towards architecture and nature, Waiji Choo finds himself constantly producing illustrations that involve world building. He currently works as a freelance concept artist in the film, videogame and theme park industries.
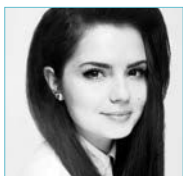
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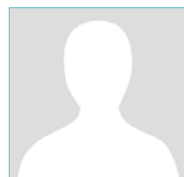
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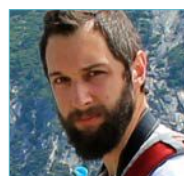
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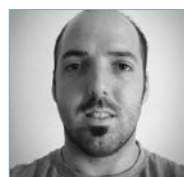
ALEX OLMEDO
Alex Olmedo is a Spanish concept designer and illustrator who is very passionate about natural landscapes. He first discovered digital painting three years ago and hasn't looked back since.

MINGCHEN SHEN
Mingchen Shen is a freelance illustrator and concept artist from the San Francisco Bay Area. He mainly works on comics and games and is currently lead artist at Treadwater.tv.

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If you're having problems viewing the double-page spreads that we feature within this magazine, then follow this handy little guide on how to set up your PDF reader!

Top tips for viewing

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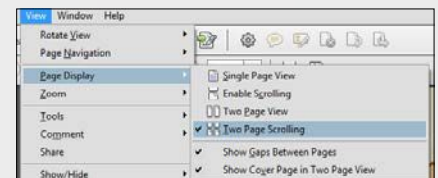
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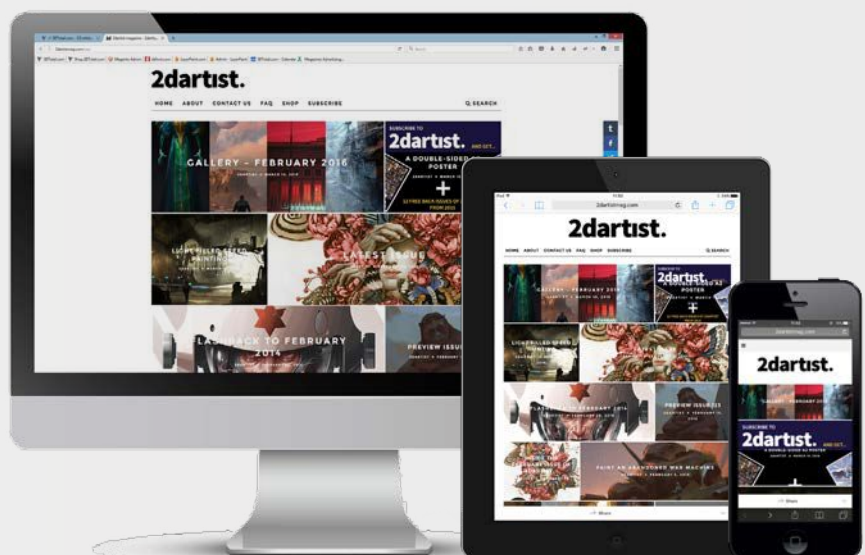
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Time to say goodbye to 2dartist

For more than 11 years *2dartist* has strived to bring you the latest in digital art tuition and an assortment of inspiring artworks from some of the most exciting professional artists around. However, all good things come to an end and issue 136 will sadly be the final issue. If you would like to continue developing your art skills, please consider subscribing to one of 3dtotal's new print magazines *GRAPHITE* and *Character Design Quarterly*. We would like to thank you, our readers, for all your support over the years.

The *2dartist* team

Ethereal sci-fi environments

Freelance concept artist Ismail Inceoglu discusses his difficult journey to becoming a concept artist and showcases his daily digital sketches ▶

The Artist

Ismail Inceoglu
artstation.com/artist/
seventeenth

Interviewed by:
Annie Moss

Ismail Inceoglu is a
concept artist based in
Varna, Bulgaria. He often
creates atmospheric
environments, featuring
mystical figures,
inspired by his love of
films and videogames.

It has taken Ismail Inceoglu several years of hard work and misdirection to reach a point where he is confident in pursuing his passion for concept art. He originally studied building construction but found that it wasn't the path for him, before unsuccessfully turning to engineering design. Despite these disappointments, Ismail found the conviction to finally follow his interest in videogame and film art.

Now Ismail creates daily digital sketches of imaginary worlds, featuring mysterious solitary characters, moody skies and atmospheric color schemes. Here Ismail discusses his difficult path to becoming a freelance concept artist, how he is always looking to improve his work, and why he believes it is important to always keep drawing…

2dartist: Hi Ismail, thanks for talking to *2dartist*! Could you start by introducing yourself a bit to the readers?

Ismail Inceoglu: Hello, everyone! First of all, it's an absolute honor to be doing this, so thank you! About me… where do I begin? I was born in a small town in Bulgaria, called Provadia, but now I live in Varna. Varna is such a great city, so beautiful, so inspiring, and one of the best places in the country for young artists.

I know it may sound like a cliché, but I don't remember a time in my life when I didn't like drawing. In elementary I even made drawings for other people in my class just because they couldn't or didn't want to draw for themselves. I graduated

from the High School of Building Construction in Varna, which actually has nothing to do with the arts and drawing, but I had to study somewhere. My father always told me that it is best to have a stable job that helps you make a living. Of course he wasn't right, or at least it wasn't the right path for me; I finished high school but wanted nothing to do with buildings. Architects and construction workers were widely spread at that time and anyone could work as one, even people without the proper education.

I decided that I needed something else; a different direction to lead me to the thing I really wanted to do, which was drawing. So I applied for university to major in engineering design, since it was the closest to the kind of art I wanted to do, but it didn't turn out well at all. I failed all of my exams and didn't get

in. It was devastating, but I decided finally to just do what I was supposed to. After years of wasting time and working different jobs I finally stopped fighting it. It was the only thing I wanted to do after all.

> ## "I imagine that every picture I make is like a prequel to an untold story and everyone can see it in a different way"

2da: Your work often features imposing landscapes and lone figures; can you tell us about the ideas behind your work?

II: Whenever I draw a person I try to put myself in their shoes. I imagine that every picture I make is

like a prequel to an untold story and everyone can see it in a different way; the viewer can finish the story in whatever way they want. In a way, I try to recreate the inner world that lives in each one of us.

Everyone has fantasies, different ideas and dreams, and you can't always put them down on paper (or screen in my case) the way you like. If someone happens to find a fragment of their dreams in my work, that is a success!

2da: Where do you look for inspiration? Are there any other artists you particularly admire?

II: I find it easy get inspiration; I can find it in literally everything, from small everyday objects to breath-taking views.

But I think there are two things I always go back to, the first being the sky, as you might notice in my works. I tend to focus on night skies or clear skies in broad daylight, lots of sunsets, different colors and weather, clouds, even planets and moons. The second thing I love drawing is imaginary dystopian landscapes. I absolutely love making imaginary apocalyptic lands and sceneries.

When it comes to artists, I have too many to choose from, so it's hard. Each one inspires me in different ways and everyone is incredibly unique in their own right. I always tend to take a little bit from every one of them and integrate it into my own work.

2da: If you could meet any artist (past or present) what would you ask them and why? ▶

A different way of life, away from the industrial towns. Nature never fails to be just as enchanting

II: I am a person who doesn't really like asking questions. I would just rather watch someone else draw. I would really love to see how Craig Mullins works and creates his masterpieces.

2da: What are your preferred tools to work with? Are there any brushes you find yourself using again and again?

II: Rough and irregular brushes are my go-to tools. When I draw I tend to make rough sketches with the bigger brushes and afterwards I work on the details. And to be honest, I have about a dozen different brushes, but I always use the same two for sketching, detailing or anything else.

2da: Which tools and software do you use? Are there any you would like to learn in the future?

II: I mostly work with the good old Photoshop. It has never failed me, and never will hopefully. I've tried using Paint a few times, so that is something I wouldn't mind learning in the future. On a serious note, there is something I really want to learn to use: 3D modeling programs. Mostly I want to use it for correctly representing lighting and perspective. But I'm never giving up on 2D drawing.

2da: How would you describe your job to a group of aliens, who have no idea what an artist is or does?

II: The first thing that comes to mind is that I am probably going to draw them. What else can you do? And if I manage to finish the drawing before getting eaten, I might even show them some of my best works and ask the aliens to buy them, as well as follow me on Instagram and Facebook. Imagine getting messages from a galaxy far, far away. And well, then I would get eaten, but not before giving them an autograph of course.

2da: What advice would you give to someone who is struggling to launch their career as an artist?

II: There is one thing everyone says and everyone should actually follow: never stop drawing. It's true for any kind of art, but especially here. Never stop doing what you do. No matter how little you like your works, no matter how bad you feel about them and yourself after doing them, no matter how little you believe in them and in yourself. Just keep working, keep doing what you love even if it's just for the hell of it. Just keep working and trust me, one day it will be worth it. Or in other words, your future self will thank you. ▶

The fictional city of Greysle. In this drawing Ismail tried to show the beauty of an industrial metropolis, frozen in time

It's long since the end of the world. After years of silence humanity sets foot on earth again. The first thing they see is this wrecked ship

Clouds, rain, wet wood and rusty iron for color practice with, of course, planets in the distance

The perspective in this image is more dynamic and gives the feeling of movement

When the threat of the end of humanity starts to loom over the earth, humans separate themselves into two fractions – good and evil. The capsule sent by the New People could fall in enemy territory

Robots are not always treated nicely by humans. They're considered to be thoughtless and emotionless machines, however they're much more than that – they're our friends

2da: What makes a project fun for you?

II: Every new project is like a link between me and the people who see my work at exhibitions or on social media. Even before I finish a piece, I can imagine or at least try to imagine what they might see, what they would feel and think when they see it. It makes me even more excited about what I do. As I said before, I draw so people can find themselves in my art. Just the prospect of this makes working fun and exciting.

2da: What do you find most challenging about working as an artist?

II: First of all: deadlines. Damn deadlines. I am sure every artist in every area can relate. Secondly, the fact that no matter how hard you try, you will never be able to draw what's exactly in your mind. It's impossible, quite literally, and as sad as this is, you just have to accept it. Try your best in your work and hope that you are satisfied with the end result.

2da: Do you have any tricks or tips to keep yourself motivated on a difficult project?

II: Deadlines! I don't recommend it, but there's nothing more motivating than an approaching

● The circles on the character's backs show their health condition and body temperature

Ismail's significant artwork

Honestly, now that I look back on my drawings I am a little bit ashamed. However, this was my first entirely digital drawing which began my love for environments. I didn't really know what I was doing at the time and I wondered what everyone liked about such landscapes. I couldn't even see my shortcomings. After receiving a good amount of critique for this particular piece, I realized that I have a lot to learn. Every passing drawing is an upgrade, trying to improve what I've already accomplished. A year later I can see my shortcomings more clearly.

deadline, especially if the project is for a client. I definitely need to stop doing this though.

Critics are also a great motivator. Some time ago I received some extremely bad and painful reviews about a drawing I had worked on for more than three months. I thought it was close to perfect, I had worked so hard, but that motivated me the next year. Disappointment also motivates me.

2da: When you're not working hard on your art, what do you like to do with your time?

II: I love going out with my friends but if I could, I wouldn't go out. I am not a fan of walks and aimlessly roaming around or going anywhere for that matter. On another note I do love going to the movies, but nothing can beat staying home and playing a videogame (like any other guy).

2da: Are there any other areas in the digital art world that you'd like to branch into and why?

II: I have always dreamed of making concept art for either the cinema or the gaming industry. I want to be the inspiration behind a movie or a game; for my art to inspire others to create art. This is what art is all about; stories and pictures, and someone's thoughts put down on paper. If this can happen… it would be a dream come true.

2da: Is there anything you think budding artists should try to avoid?

II: Don't settle for what you have and what you've done so far. Always aspire and look for more. Never compete with other artists as there will always be someone better, someone more experienced, and more appreciated.

But know this, someone is going to look at you and think the same way, and you don't want to be the one discouraging them. Just focus on your own work, compete only with yourself, and always aspire to be better than who you were yesterday. Always try to get better and work better. After all the art is all that matters.

Thank you Ismail for talking to 2dartist! ●
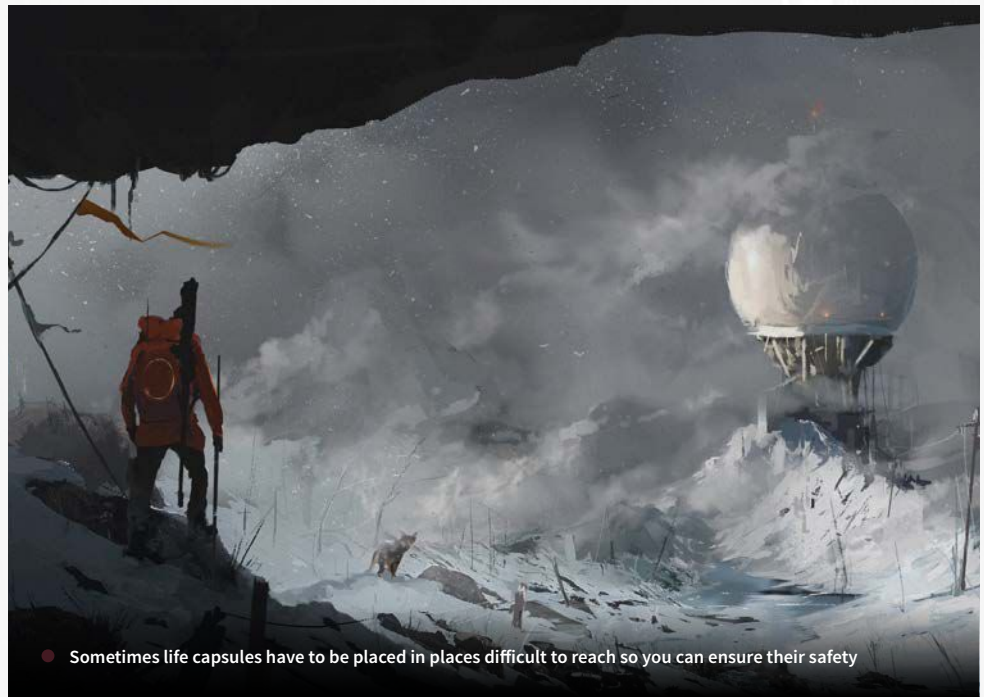
● **Sometimes life capsules have to be placed in places difficult to reach so you can ensure their safety**
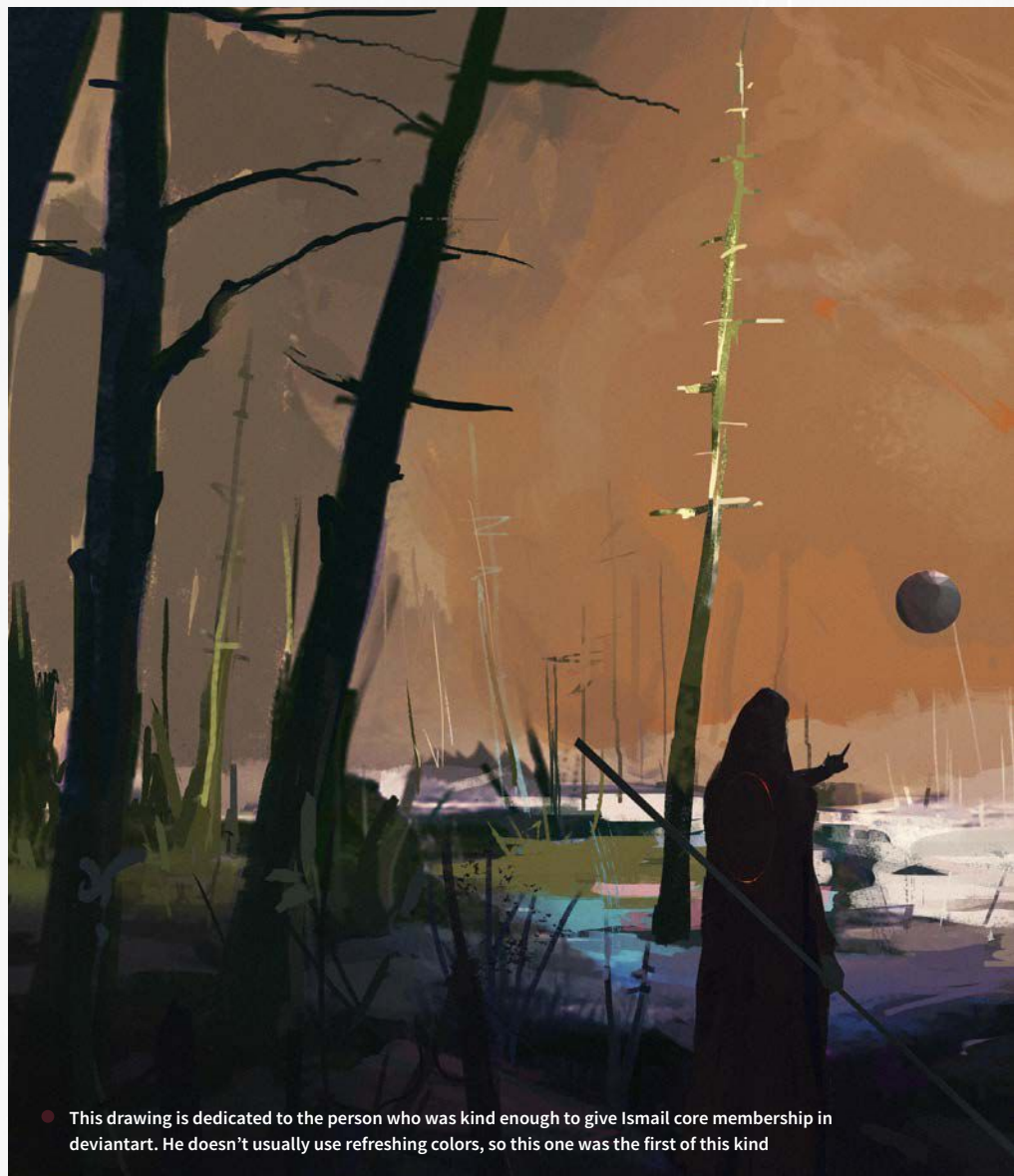
● **This drawing is dedicated to the person who was kind enough to give Ismail core membership in deviantart. He doesn't usually use refreshing colors, so this one was the first of this kind**

This image is reminiscent of a long expedition reaching its destination – an ancient forgotten city. The painting carries a sense of relief and wonder
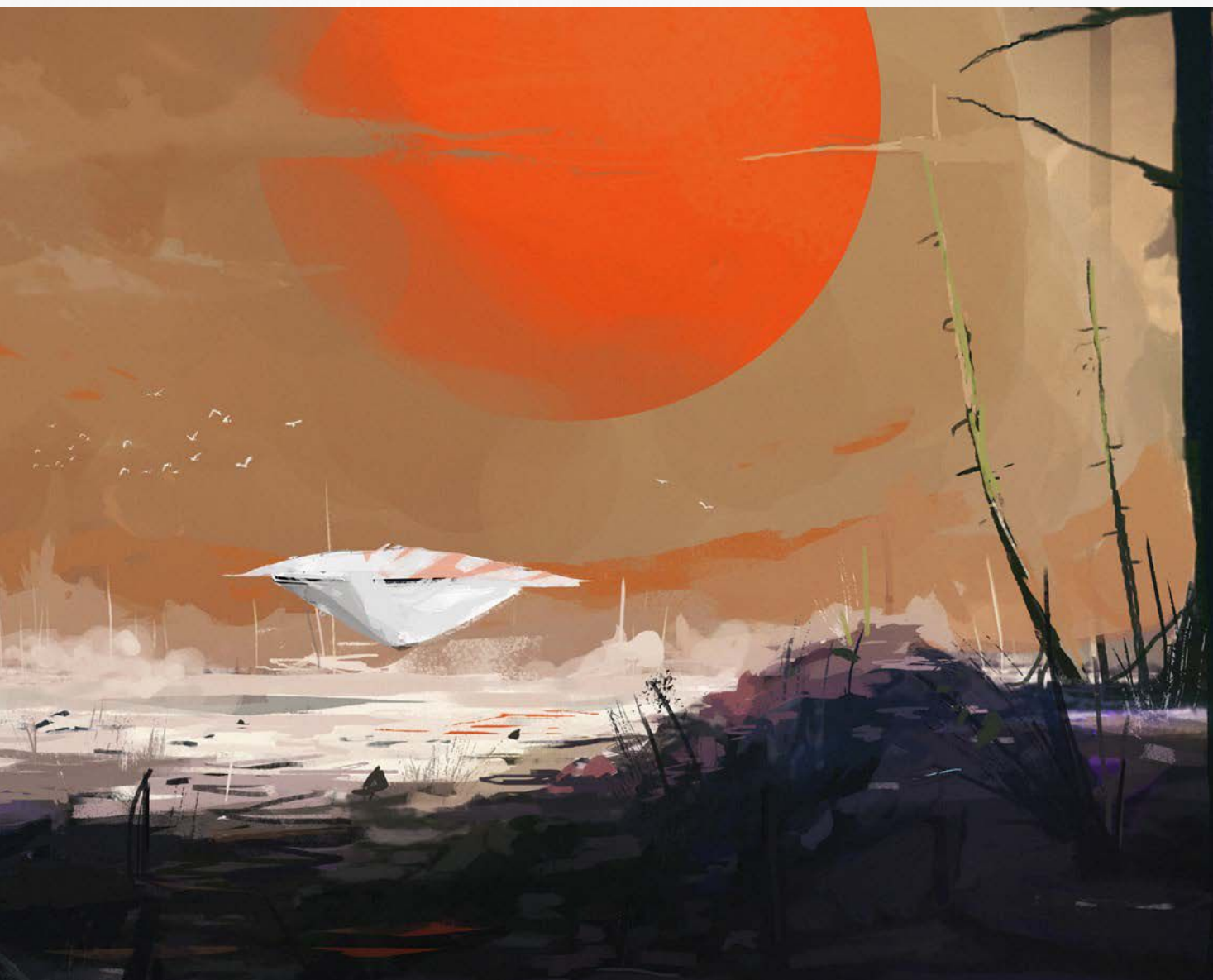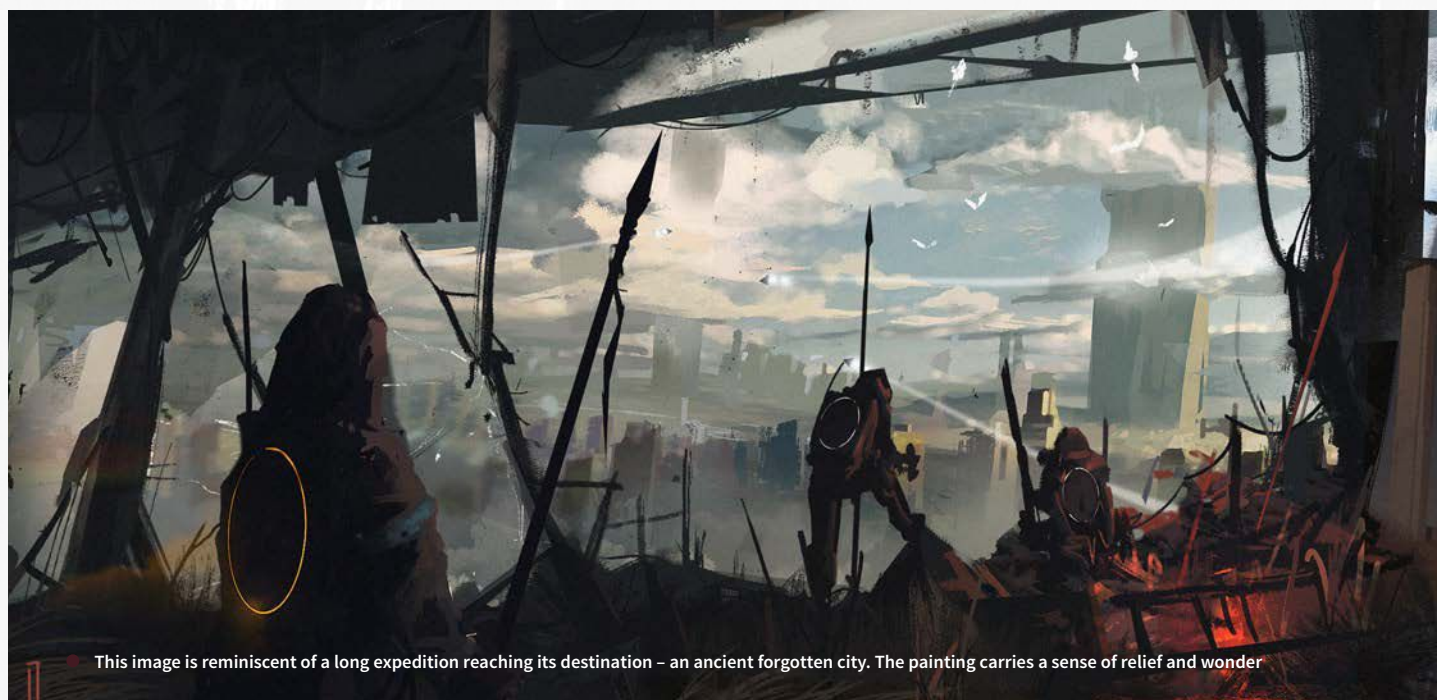
● The old drawing style meets the new. In this case in a
post-apocalyptic town with a detailed landscape

The Artist

Maximilian Degen
maximiliandegen.com

Interviewed by:
Annie Moss

Maximilian Degan is a thirty-one year old concept artist and illustrator, born and raised in Berlin, currently residing in sunny Sydney. Currently he works from home on various freelance projects.

Bright and bold game concepts

Maximilian Degen, artist for projects including *Hearthstone* and *Ori and the Blind Forest*, shares his personal illustrations and discusses professional working practices... ▶

A practice illustration from 2016. Maximilian just loved painting trees

Maximilian Degen's artworks have a distinctly bright and colorful trend which is the result of his attention to color contrasts. His tendency for perfectionism means he continues working until he has achieved a dynamic balance and an illustration he is fully satisfied with. As an experienced concept artist who has worked on multiple projects including the videogames *Hearthstone* and *Ori and the Blind Forest*, and films such as *Red Tails*, Maximilian developed a strong ability to deal with complex visual problems. He shares his tips for a streamlined professional workflow, why he loves working on a variety of projects, and how to overcome the dreaded artist block.

2dartist: Hi Max, thank you for talking to *2dartist*! Can you kick things off by telling us a little bit about yourself and your work?

Maximilian Degen: My pleasure! I have been freelancing full time for about two years now since I left Moon Studios after we finished *Ori and the Blind Forest*. Due to the nature of freelancing I am involved in many different projects, so my job changes constantly. Mostly I do either narrative illustration or concept designs for games. I can't leak any specific information about what I am doing right now but I definitely can't complain about variety!

In November and December I was working on Blizzard's *Hearthstone*. Last month I was doing environment concepts for a mobile games company using a really loose line style. After that I was doing a series of tightly rendered card game illustrations. Right now I am in the process of creating an art style for another company. I would say this is what I love most about my work; it never gets boring, at least for the time being.

"I don't want to dive into theory too much but colors work best when they complement each other"

2da: Your works often feature bright colors and intense flashes of light, do you have any tips for readers who want to create this look in their own work?

MD: I think most of my color appeal comes from exaggerating colors a lot. Often I use quite literal colors; grass is very green, and sky is blue. I combine this native way of coloring with realistic methods of rendering.

The most important aspect for my paintings is contrasts, I don't want to dive into theory too much but colors work best when they complement

each other. Starting off with a cold/warm contrast is almost always a good idea. If the base of the image is founded on that principle it is easy to add more variety and broaden the color spectrum in the following steps. I really love to over-emphasize colors by adding a lot of glow in the important parts where I want the viewer to look.

2da: What made you want to pursue a career as an artist?

MD: I was always drawing as a child, mostly dinosaurs, airplanes, wizards and elves, the usual. Playing games was a big factor as well. I think I first fell in love with game art when I saw the artwork for *Warcraft III*. Shortly after that game came out I found a German artist community in an online forum called *digitaldecoy* founded by amazing digital artist Daniel Lieske. I was totally amazed by all the talented artists showing off their digital images that I had to buy a graphic tablet myself and just try it out over and over again.

2da: What are your preferred tools to work with and why?

MD: At the moment I use an Intuos Pro 5 and Photoshop when I am painting digitally. I try a lot of different brushes but not anything fancy ▶

A practice illustration from 2016. Maximilian wanted to combine something silly with something serious here

really; mostly chalk and airbrushes. I am a big fan of the Lasso tool in Photoshop. It is just so fast and gives you really nice, clean results.

I rely heavily on layers as well. I like to keep everything separated so I can easily manipulate or change things. For example, if I paint a character I usually have individual layers for face (sometimes even eyes and mouth), hair, hands, clothing, armor, and weapons. It might be a bit of a pain to set up properly but it saves so much time if you make a mistake or just quickly want to adjust something. Also I like that everything stays very clean and sharp.

Sometimes I like to get away from the computer and just do some drawings in my sketchbooks. I love the A5 Moleskine with that slightly tinted paper. I've filled many of those over the years.

2da: Which tools, techniques or software would you like to explore in the future, and why?

MD: I must say I am not too fancy about trying out new techniques or software at the moment. Back in my study days at university I tried almost everything I could get my hands on. I tried doing typography, etching on lithographic stone plates, etching on acrylic, acrylic painting, oil painting, inking, pencils, Maya, and Corel Painter. I've tried figure drawing, figure painting, and expressive painting; simply everything. At the moment I am just happy to paint and draw with Photoshop. It will always be the tool of choice for me.

I am definitely following the industry though and seeing what everybody is coming up with. I think it is important to keep an open mind and keep up-to-date with where your industry is heading. I don't feel obligated to do what everybody else is doing. I feel like there is still so much to learn and explore in 2D painting that this is all I ever want to do. Who knows what the future will bring? Maybe I will become a 3D artist at some point! ▶
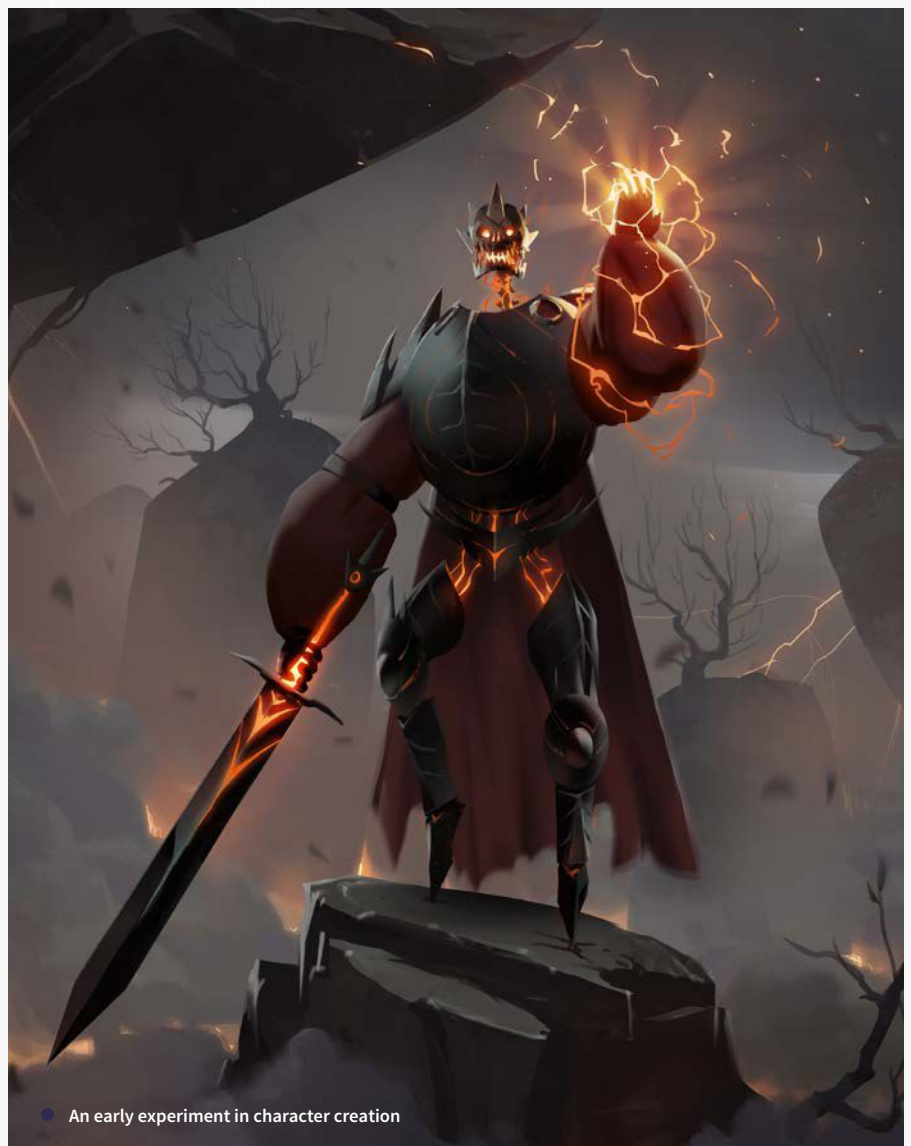
● **An early experiment in character creation**

2da: Which artist or group of artists particularly inspire your work?

MD: There are so many amazing artists out there that it is hard to cut it down to a couple. I love Brad Rigney for his approach and work moral; he is just a beast. In terms of drawing abilities I admire Wesley Burt and Marko Djurdjevic. When it comes to color I am amazed by what Thomas Scholes has done in his videos on livestream.com. He nails the dreamy and whimsical feel in painting.

As mentioned before I am a big fan of the art style of *Warcraft III* and also *Diablo*, I guess through playing these games so much they had a massive impact on my understanding of color simplification and art style in general. Luckily enough I was always surrounded by talented people. I would also like to mention Johannes Figlhuber and Simon

Kopp who I worked closely on *Ori and the Blind Forest* with. I learned a lot from those guys.

2da: If you could meet any artist (past or present) what would you ask them and why?

MD: Again there are probably too many in this world, both present and past. I think it would be amazing to talk to Kim Jung Gi for a bit to pick his brain about the way he memorizes and visualizes things. I am assuming his brain must be wired differently to pull off what he does. His ability to visualize everything our world exists of would be a neat skill to have.

Craig Mullins must be a wicked teacher as well. I would love to find out about his love to paint absolutely every single subject, and theme, this world has to offer. He seems to find interesting aspects in everything we see; a true master.

2da: Where (and when) do you feel you are at your most creative?

MD: That's an interesting question. I feel like my creative juices are flowing best in the early morning and then again in the evening or night time. I get into a state of "flow" where it seems like everything around me just disappears and the hours fly by. I definitely need a lot of quiet when I am designing things so I can concentrate on what I am doing. Once I get to "easier" parts of a painting such as applying base colors or rendering details I definitely need music or I get bored really easily.

I think I could be more creative though. I spend a lot of time (probably more than most) figuring out interesting ways of giving life to my paintings. I have a little perfectionist in me which forces me to keep working on something until I am fully satisfied.

● Personal illustration from 2015 at a time when Maximilian had to paint a lot of planets for a job

That unfortunately means that a painting will take me a very long time from start to completion. I guess everybody has their flaws and qualities.

"I remember times when it was just such a struggle to pick up my sketchbook and pen that I just couldn't do it sometimes"

2da: Artist block is a problem for many creative people. Can you share a couple of tips you use when the inspiration stops flowing?

MD: I am very familiar with it. Luckily I haven't gotten it much in recent years. I then usually watched movies or played games, or met my friends. Back then I would've said that it is best to do no art at all when you feel a block.

Today I would say that you can do art at any time you want either with, or without, artist block. It is all about finding a good workflow that just never lets you down. I feel like artist block only comes up when you feel overwhelmed by the task at hand. If you start with something simple like a line drawing of a face, or even just a circle, and take it from there you can easily get back into whatever

you're trying to do. Sometimes it also helps to write down what you are actually trying to draw.

2da: What has been the project you have most enjoyed working on?

MD: There are multiple projects that I have enjoyed working on. The most valuable learning experience ▶

If you could write a letter to your younger self, just starting out as an artist, what advice would you give?

"Dear Maximilian, please put the paintbrush aside, pick up a pencil and learn how to draw the fundamentals." I think I went a couple of steps too far before I learned the basic rules of drawing. I always wanted to rush in with crazy colors but I didn't know why I was doing it. I should've learned some color theory first. Besides that I am actually quite happy with how everything turned out in terms of my skill. I am a jack of all trades and I've tried a bit of everything. I think that's what created my colorful, energetic style.

was definitely *Ori and the Blind Forest*. I worked on it for almost four years so naturally I evolved a lot as an artist during that project. I became very good at visual problem-solving after a while, simply because it was a massive project with intensely complex visual problems to solve. We created a whole world and back story for almost everything. I still feed on those times for inspiration.

There were other very fun projects; in particular I remember the pitch for *Linker Saga* that I created together with my friend and art director Peter Söderbaum for the entertainment company King. All those bright colors and cute planets were just a joy to work on.

2da: What initial steps do you take when you are first given a brief for a new project?

MD: A good and very important question! Before I draw even a single line I try to talk with the client for as long as I can and get as much information out of them as possible. It is important to find out what you are meant to do first. It can be deceiving to feel time pressure and start sketching right away, and I have definitely done that a lot in the past, but it usually just leads to a bad final product. These days I sit down for at least a couple of hours and find reference photographs for inspiration. It just helps the creative juices flow. That doesn't mean you should copy what you see in a photo, but rather interpret it in your own way.

I also recommend sticking with line drawing for the first draft that you show the client. It saves you a lot of trouble and tears if you have to change something or the client isn't happy. Once the client approves the line drawing it depends if they want to see a grayscale sketch or if they trust you enough to skip this part. I personally don't like to do grayscale at all as it feels a bit like wasted time. Underneath the line drawing I really love the method of filling in the basic colors of every individual object in the drawing. Once that is done I usually go ahead with a Multiply layer of 70% black and define the shadows and light direction.

In the steps that follow I keep adding shadow layers to define the darkest bits of the painting. Then on top I like to use either Normal or Linear Dodge layers to paint in some direct lighting, spectacular lighting, reflective lights, and so on. Once I feel like the painting is 80% done I keep adding Normal layers and just paint on top of everything and finish the painting. In the very end ▶

This image was painted after a very inspiring trip to China and you can see some influences in there
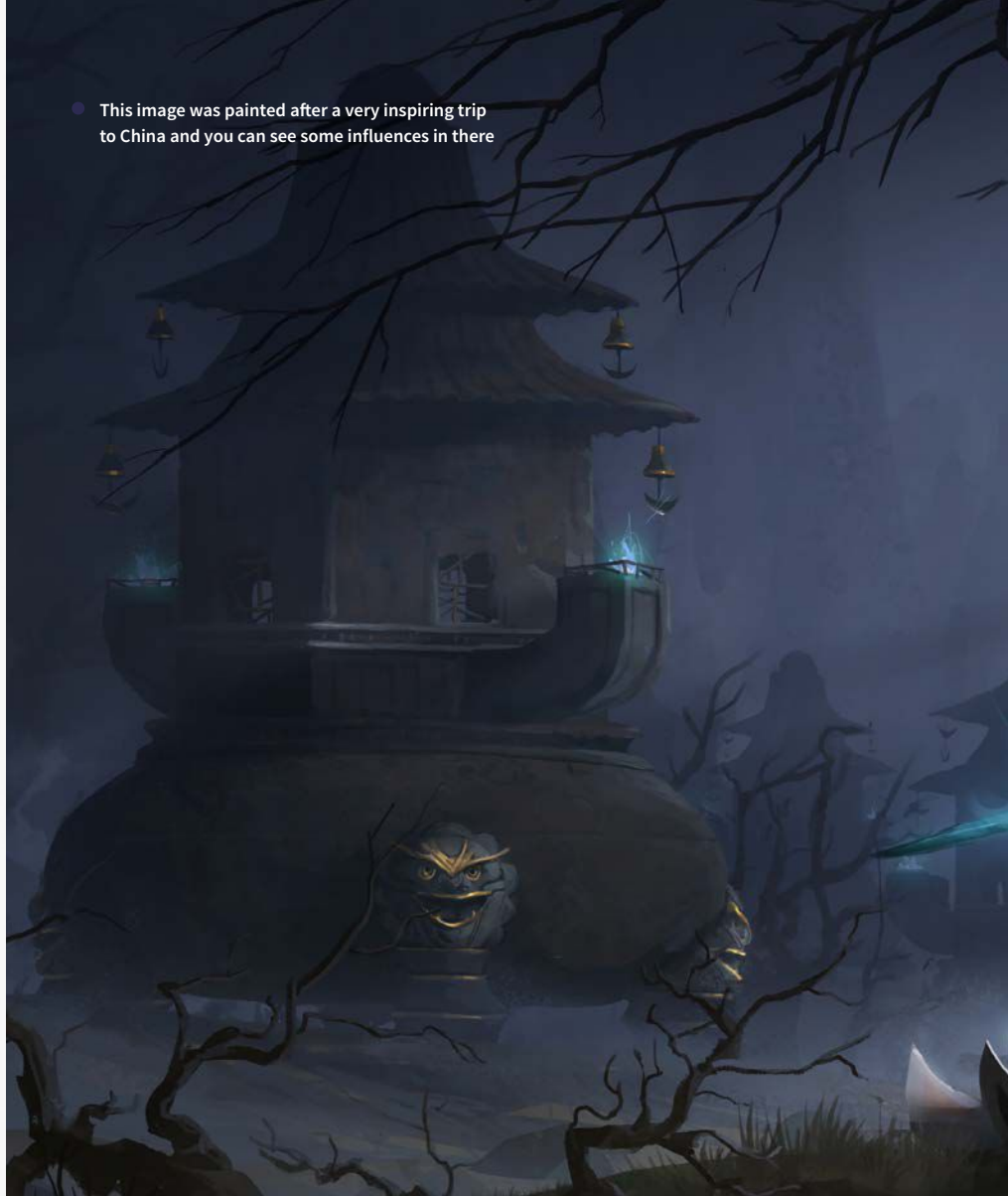
Illustration practice from 2015 to practice storytelling

A personal piece from 2016 which is not too meaningful. Maximilian just wanted to paint something cute

I use Color Dodge, Linear Dodge and adjustment layers to squeeze more contrast out of everything.

2da: How do you keep yourself motivated when working on a difficult project?

MD: Our job can be very hard, just like any other job. Sometimes I really don't want to work or I am de-motivated because I am not satisfied with my own performance. It doesn't happen often but when it does I just grit my teeth and get the job done.

I don't have a magical recipe for overcoming problems or bad moods during work. I just do the grind. For me it is a natural thing to happen and it just balances out the fun times that I have. Sometimes you just have to deal with it!

2da: When you're not working hard on your art, what do you like to do with your time?

MD: I am quite happy when I don't do art sometimes. I am a big movie fan and watch a lot

of them. It inspires me to do art so it is a good thing for me to do. Since I moved to Australia two years ago I have also become a big fan of bush walking as they call it here. It just means to go for a walk in nature. Since the weather is almost always great here you can do that a lot.

Also I love to spend time with my girlfriend and just goof around. I try to work out and be active a lot as well but it doesn't always work because I am generally a lazy person who likes to be in a horizontal position. Last year I bought a Kindle and became addicted to reading. I was never really big on reading but I am catching up on some classics and stuff that I always wanted to read. I am into Stephen King a lot lately and have been working my way through the *Dark Tower* series. It is a great series to get lost in because it is just so imaginative and crazy.

When I don't want to do art but still feel like learning something about painting, I watch artist interviews or tutorial videos. I really enjoyed Bobby Chiu's artist interviews recently.

2da: Finally, where will we be able to see your work next? Are there any projects we should look out for?

MD: I hope I can show some more work soon. A lot of stuff is under NDA still. It will be a lot of smaller stuff like illustrations or concept art for different projects. I haven't been part of a bigger project for a long time. As I mentioned, I like the variety that I get from that. I wouldn't mind committing to something big again soon though. Who knows what the future will bring?

Thank you Maximilian for talking to 2dartist! ●

The Artist

Maximilian Degen
maximiliandegen.com

Maximilian's significant artwork

I created this artwork in 2014 and it is still one of my personal favorites. It depicts a moment in the life of a little dragon family. This took me a long time to finish but I wanted to do it to the best of my abilities at that time.

I wanted to give every little dragon their own character and attitude. The one in the bottom left corner is a bit of a rascal chasing away some little crabs. They also seem to have a bit of an attitude trying to snap him with their claws and teach him a lesson. The other two dragons are meant to be very impatient looking. They are both trying to get the first bite of the bird from their mama. The mama dragon is meant to have this typical parent-look on her face: slightly annoyed but also aware of her duty, a bit weary from sleep deprivation maybe. On top of all that I painted a little chase in the background to emphasize the hunting method of these Caribbean dragons.

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The Artist
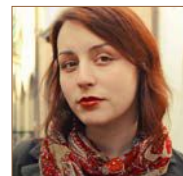
Nataša Ilinčić
natasailincic.com

Nataša Ilinčić is an Edinburgh-based illustrator, who draws influence from European folktales and long hikes in locations where the trees and ruins outnumber people. Her weapon of choice is watercolor.

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

Folklore inspired illustrations

NUDITY WARNING

Freelance illustrator Nataša Ilinčić shares her beautiful artworks inspired by folklore, mythology and the relationship between humankind and nature ▶

Hagstones: watercolor and gouache

Folklore, mythology, femininity, and the complex relationship between humankind and the natural world we inhabit are the main stimulants for Nataša Ilinčić's elegant illustrations. Her love of nature has propelled her passion for art which in turn has advanced into a bright career, exhibiting works internationally and creating illustrations for books and magazines.

Working mostly from her cozy Scottish studio, or when traveling, Nataša uses a variety of traditional mediums to create her works, including watercolor and gouache paints, graphite, ink and even tea stains, and often some digital work too. Here Nataša discusses her favorite projects, how she manages her time as a freelance artist, and announces her exciting new personal project…

2dartist: Hello Nataša! Thanks for talking to *2dartist*. First off, could you introduce yourself with a bit about your background and projects?

Nataša Ilinčić: Hi! I'm currently working as a freelance illustrator from my quirky little studio in Edinburgh, Scotland but my roots are Croatian and I grew up in Italy. During my university years I always kept my passion for illustration alive. After a BA in Archaeology, I graduated with honors in Cultural Anthropology at the University of Venice with a dissertation on traditional tattooing in the Balkans. After that I decided to pursue my artistic career full-time, and nourish it with themes that speak deeply to me: folklore, mythology, and the relationship between humankind and nature.

"For as long as I can remember my fingers have been dirtied with graphite and paint"

2da: What or who encouraged you to take up a career as an artist?

NI: When I was eleven years old I remember my mother getting an expensive custom wooden frame for a map of an imaginary island I had painted with ink. We were not wealthy, quite the opposite, so it meant the world to me to see that someone valued my creations that much. For as long as I can remember my fingers have been dirtied with graphite and paint. I happened to be good at it, and kept practicing in every spare moment with no other goal than personal ▶

Beltane: watercolor, gouache, graphite, and digital painting

Winter's Eve: watercolor, graphite, ink, and digital painting

A feeble heartbeat under bone: watercolor, gouache, graphite, and digital painting

Nataša Ilinčić

expression and satisfaction. The next thing I knew, my passion had turned into a profession.

2da: Your work is often centered on nature and folklore. Can you tell us a bit more about the ideas behind your work?

NI: Nature plays as important a role in my art as it does in my life; I feel most at home in the quietness of the autumn woods, or the noise of spring reawakening. As I see it, folklore is the result of a millennia-long dialogue between man and nature, and I find exploring various aspects of it through art to be endlessly interesting. There is so much more to world mythologies than simple bedtime stories; it's a field of research that is always raising questions that are well worth answering.

2da: Last year for Inktober you collaborated with poet Hayden Westfield-Bell to illustrate his poems. How was the collaboration and has the process influenced your work since?
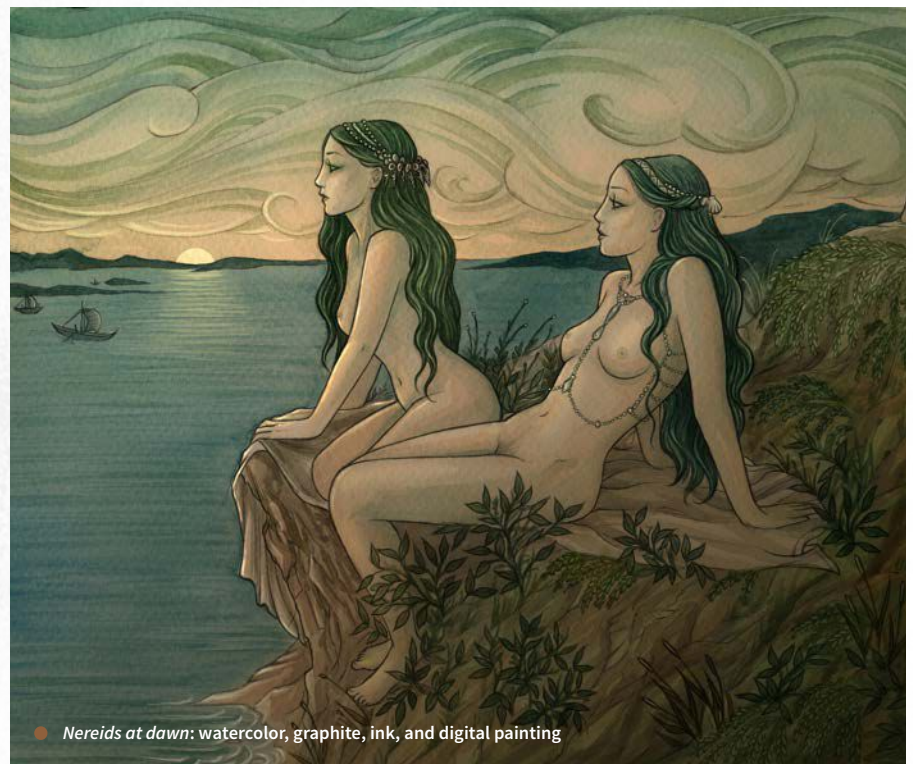
NI: Our 2016 Inktober collaboration was challenging but incredibly satisfying, largely because it wasn't a one way process: sometimes I would illustrate one of Hayden's poems, other times he would find inspiration in one of my drawings and come up with verse. In other cases we would work independently, drawing inspiration from one word or concept and then put our creations together and see how they interacted. It definitely inspired us to consider more collaborations in the future, both for poetry and prose. There's a whole story behind our *Zeppelin* piece, just waiting to be put on paper!

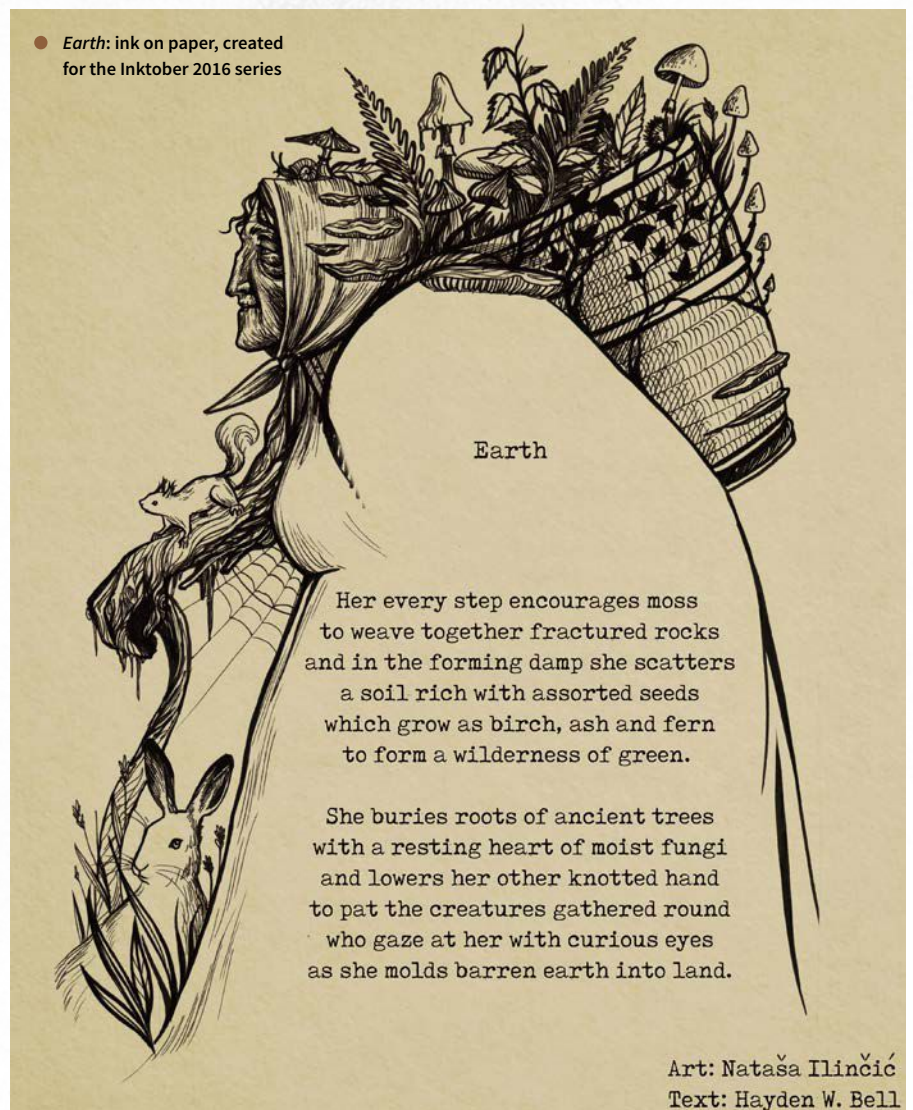**2da:** Do you have a favorite place you like to go to draw?

NI: Familiar places are the best places to draw. I like drawing whilst traveling, sketching landscapes, people, and old architectures. For more challenging work however I rely on the coziness of my studio, where there's always a rich supply of tea and reference books, or on the old armchair at my family's home next to the fireplace.

2da: What advice can you give to our readers who want to develop their drawing techniques in a similar manner?

NI: Practice a lot, observe even more. Remember that mistakes are a relative concept and try to ▶

Nereids at dawn: watercolor, graphite, ink, and digital painting

Earth: ink on paper, created for the Inktober 2016 series

Earth

Her every step encourages moss
to weave together fractured rocks
and in the forming damp she scatters
a soil rich with assorted seeds
which grow as birch, ash and fern
to form a wilderness of green.

She buries roots of ancient trees
with a resting heart of moist fungi
and lowers her other knotted hand
to pat the creatures gathered round
who gaze at her with curious eyes
as she molds barren earth into land.

Art: Nataša Ilinčić
Text: Hayden W. Bell

see them as experiments instead of failures. While demanding a lot from yourself can improve your skills and keep your industriousness high, stress can be very counterproductive so try not to stress about your work.

That said, if you're as human as I am, you will stress anyway so at least try to stress for the right reasons. For example, "I'm not expressing what I want in this piece" is more helpful than "I'm not as good as that other artist."

2da: What are your preferred tools to work with and why?

NI: I tend to stick to a pencil and notebook when it comes to sketching, especially when I need to quickly draft down an idea on paper. When working on more complex compositions I prefer sketching digitally in order to move and edit objects more easily.

My favorite medium is watercolor; there is something exciting about its unpredictability, you can never control its quicksilver motions completely. I also work with gouache, and rely on graphite and ink when playing with bolder lines. Digital painting is often the final part of my process; I mostly use it to add depth and details. ▶

● *Hecate*: watercolor, ink, and digital painting

Fairy on toy castle: graphite on paper and digital painting. Created for the R.E. Vance's *Paradise Lot* series

2da: Where do you turn to for inspiration? Are there any artists you like to reference?

NI: As I see it, you can either look for inspiration in an active way, or let inspiration come to you in a more passive way. The former relies on brainstorming and stimulating your mind with books or strolls around museums, while the latter is about letting inspiration come to you – and that's by far my favorite method. I find myself to be particularly receptive to new ideas when walking or (cliché but true) showering. I think, looking at my pieces, that it's easy to spot my references: Symbolist, Pre-Raphaelite painters and Art Nouveau hold a special place in my heart.

2da: What has been your favorite project to work on so far?

NI: The work I did for *The Illuminated Edda* is definitely among my favorites, as it gave me a chance to deepen my knowledge of Norse mythology, reimagine its inhabitants, and connect even more with the concepts behind Ásatrú spirituality.

I also enjoyed working on the artwork for R.E. Vance's urban fantasy series *Paradise Lot.* His stories depict the life of deities and creatures from world mythologies living as refugees in a post apocalyptic godless world. Minotaurs that work as pizza delivery guys, fairies that inhabit old 90s toy castles, goblins that serve ice cream! Illustrating them was just so much fun!

2da: How do you deal with a challenging project? Do you have any tips for our readers?

> ⚡ **NATAŠA'S SIGNIFICANT ARTWORK**
>
> *Mother* is a piece that is very dear to me; a tribute to all the women in my life that taught me courage, kindness, resilience and love

NI: As many Ancient Greek tales tell us, you cannot defeat a giant with your strength alone. You need intelligence, and careful planning. So my advice is to take your time when conducting research; it's time well spent. Carefully outline each step and build strong foundations. Once you've set your goals the hardest part then is maintaining motivation and staying committed. Big projects can be long and energy consuming, but they're also the most rewarding ones. Be inventive, stubborn, and most of all passionate.

2da: Are there any other skills and techniques you would like to learn in the future? Are there any materials you would like to experiment with?

NI: I have to admit I have a secret crush on oil painting. We had a brief affair years-ago, but I would love to turn it into something more serious. Oil painting has a depth and smoothness that watercolor lacks, and that has always fascinated me. I hope I will find some time in the future to work a bit more with it! I've also been experimenting with tea painting for quite some time now, and I'd like to keep that up and see where it goes!

2da: What has your experience as a freelance artist been like? What lessons have you learned?

NI: As we all know, freelancing comes with pros and cons. Flexibility on one side, uncertainty on the other. Not having fixed hours can often lead to over-exhaustion if you're unable to separate work and free time. So you have to figure out what your ideal balance is; freelancing isn't just art, but also admin, research, accounting and promotion. All in all, it's a small price to pay to be able to work on what you're really passionate about!

2da: What does a working day in your life look like?

NI: I'm a big fan of to-do lists, so my working day starts with a list with a cup of tea on the side. I find that's the most effective way of getting through the inevitably large pile of work sitting on my desk, and it helps to maintain a strong sense of direction and precedence. ▶

Tremble: watercolor, graphite, and digital painting

Threading Thunder: watercolor, gouache, graphite, and digital painting

I tend to work through the admin and the small things in the morning, and then concentrate on the bigger projects in the afternoon. I try to find some time every day for sketching and experimentation, which is an important part of the artist's growth.

2da: How do you like to spend your time when you aren't creating beautiful art?

NI: I like to dedicate as much free time as I can to the outdoors, going out for long walks in the wilderness, learning about plants, foraging and observing animals. That said I don't turn my nose up at cities, especially those that have extensive histories. I can often be found wandering urban ravines; trying to decode their past and admiring their architecture. When indoors, I like to spend most of my free time engaging with something that has a good writing behind it, this could be books, videogames, or films.

2da: And finally, what can we look forward to from you next?

NI: This is the first time I'm talking about it publicly: I've recently started working on a personal project, an illustrated book that will feature a gallery of witches' portraits through the ages and across countries. It aims to be a collection of their stories, enriched with their personal quotes, and working within the genres of historical fiction with a touch of magical realism. It'll give me a chance to combine my interest in history with my passion for art, combining stories of forgotten outcasts with my own knowledge of folklore, history of witchcraft and fashion design. ●

Thank you Nataša for taking the time to speak to 2dartist today!

Blood Orange: watercolor, ink, and digital painting

The Artist

Waiji Choo
www.waijichoo.com

Drawn towards architecture and nature, Waiji Choo finds himself constantly producing illustrations that involve world building. He currently works as a freelance concept artist in the film, videogame and theme park industries.

Sketchbook of Waiji Choo: Sketching elaborate imaginary worlds

Concept artist Waiji Choo shares the sketches which inspired the elaborate worlds of his personal projects *Ironheart* and *Voyage* ▶

## See how happy accidents can create inspired illustrations...

Growing up I remember my mother occasionally taking my brother and I to the bookstore to pick up books. Without reading into any of them, I would only take home the ones with interesting illustrated covers, and instead of reading those books I would redraw their covers. When drawing became a habit to me, I started doing it whenever and wherever I could. I am not proud of it, but I think my first sketchbooks were probably my school textbooks.

> "I realized that having a sketchbook on me wherever I went was the best way for me to remember and document ideas or the inspirations around me"

Motivated by artworks from animation and videogames, I decided to pursue an education in animation, and later concept art. Since then I have been working in the film, videogame, and theme park industries with film director Raman Hui, production designer Guillaume Aretos, and companies such as Walt Disney Imagineering, and NCSOFT. I realized that having a sketchbook on me wherever I went was the best way for me to remember and document ideas or the inspirations around me. Even though most of the artwork I produce is done digitally, I still enjoy making thumbnails and designs on paper.

Inspiration and ideas:

My inspirations come from film, videogames and photography, but most of the time they come from taking walks. I find that taking walks or short drives are a great way for me to free up my mind to think of ideas inspired from nature and the people around. Other times, I look back at paintings or sketches by artists such as Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, Joseph Wright, Tom Lovell and Herbert Ryman. It's always so ▶
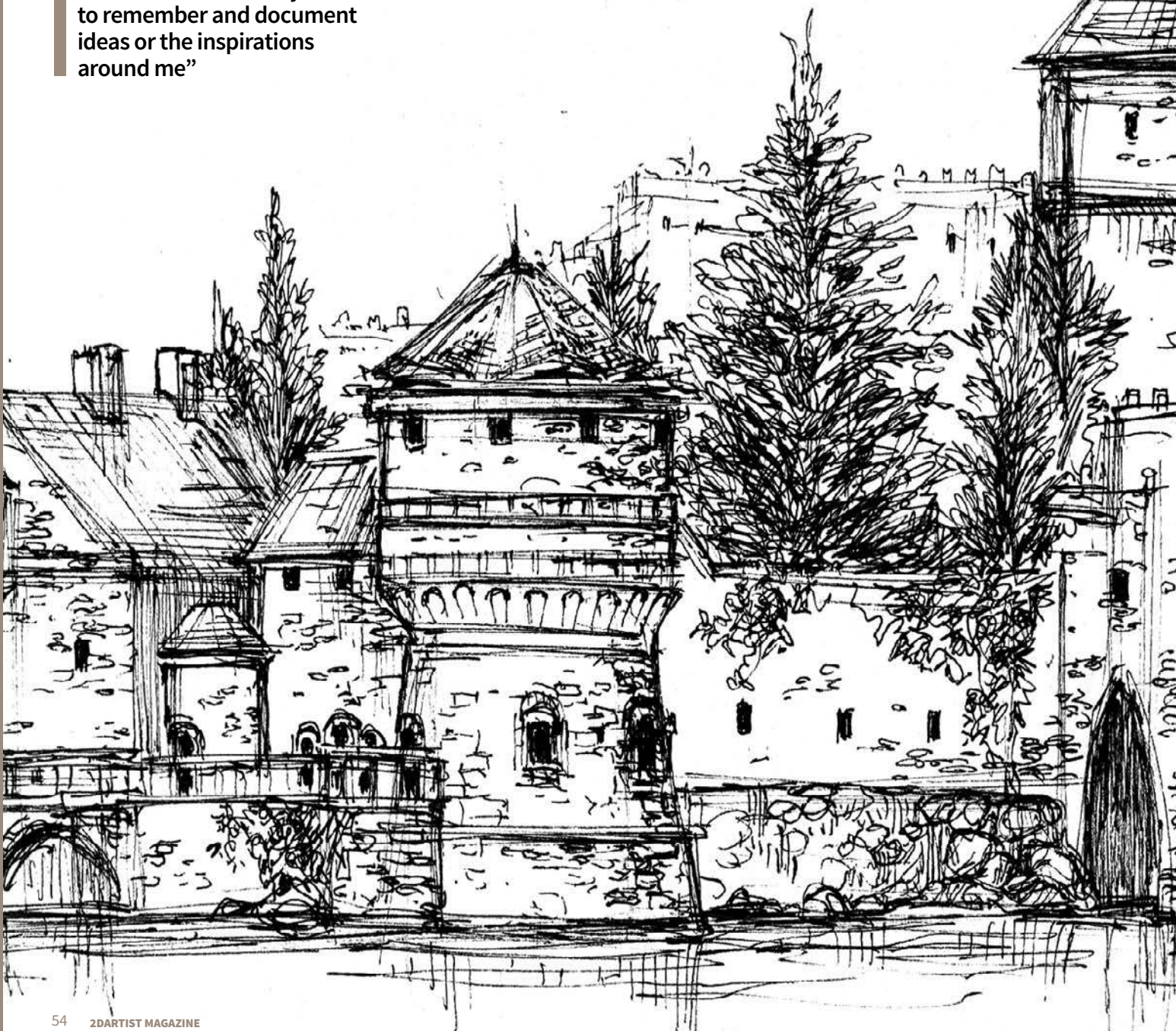
● *Empty town*, a medieval environment exploration sketch for the book *Voyage*

inspiring to observe the way they compose and plan their pieces. Even though I do not get the opportunity to visit art galleries frequently, when I do it usually ends up being very influential.

From time to time, my personal work is actually inspired by the jobs that I get. Being in pre-production, I am tasked to produce multiple concepts for a single piece. Through the process of brainstorming, I am influenced to produce personal artwork with similar moods or genres. Aside from that most of my ideas usually come from a lot of coffee and thinking.

However, I do think that the sketches I have the most fun with come from "happy accidents." It feels great when I get a good idea, but it feels even better when these happy accidents occur. A good idea can appear clearly in my head, yet sometimes when it is down on paper it is not as great as it was in my head. As I continue sketching, something unexpected happens and suddenly the mistake I made evolves into a good idea.

> **"When sketching I do not particularly look for ways to create effects, instead I look for the most efficient way to convey the idea or mood of the sketch"**

Materials:
My favorite material to work in has to be inks. I love it. Although it is unforgiving, it helps me build confidence in every stroke I put down. I hate when I make mistakes, but I also like that it makes me think of ways to hide those mistakes. When sketching I do not particularly look for ways to create effects, instead I look for the most efficient way to convey the idea or mood of the sketch.

Having a fairly short attention span, I enjoy using a few pens with different nib sizes to execute a sketch quickly. Even though I am usually open to using any pen lying around, I do feel most comfortable using the Pilot G-Tec-C4, Pilot Fineliner and Tombow ABT brush pen.

Recently, I have been experimenting with Procreate on my iPad. Although I am not used to sketching over such a smooth surface, I do enjoy the fact that I can quickly add color or values into my sketches. In the future, given the opportunity, I would like to pick up calligraphy. I'm inspired by its flexibility to move from thick and thin, and I am very curious to see how it will influence the way I sketch.

Sketching techniques:
When sketching I like to start by holding my pen with a loose grip. By making light indications, ▶

⚡ WAIJI'S SIGNIFICANT ARTWORK

Movement

Used to creating quick and loose pre-production sketches, it never crossed my mind that people would be interested having my sketches on their walls. *Movement* was one of the first original sketches that I sold, and it was important for me to see that people outside my industry could enjoy my art enough to have it in their homes or studios. This motivated me to create more pieces like it to share with others.

Retractable fingers.

Extentable Limbs.
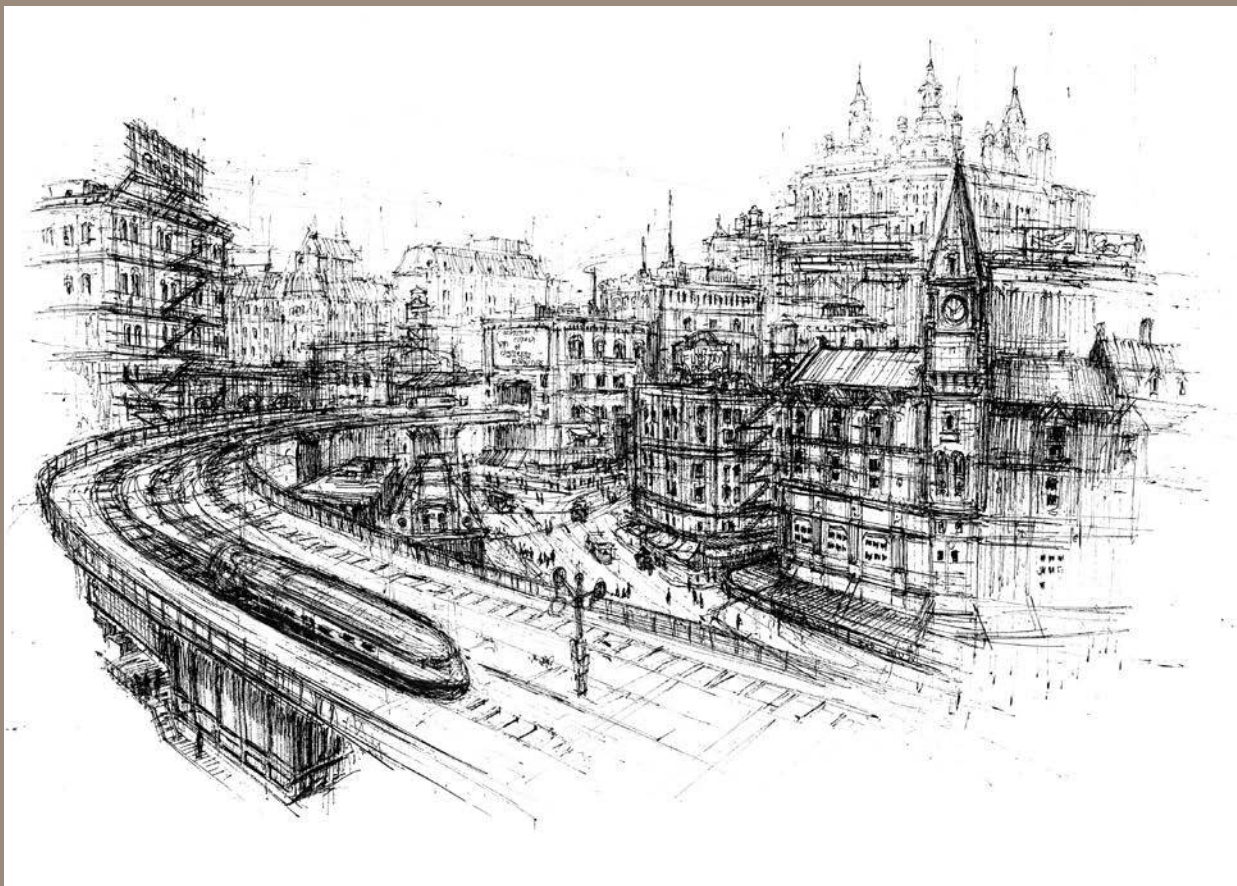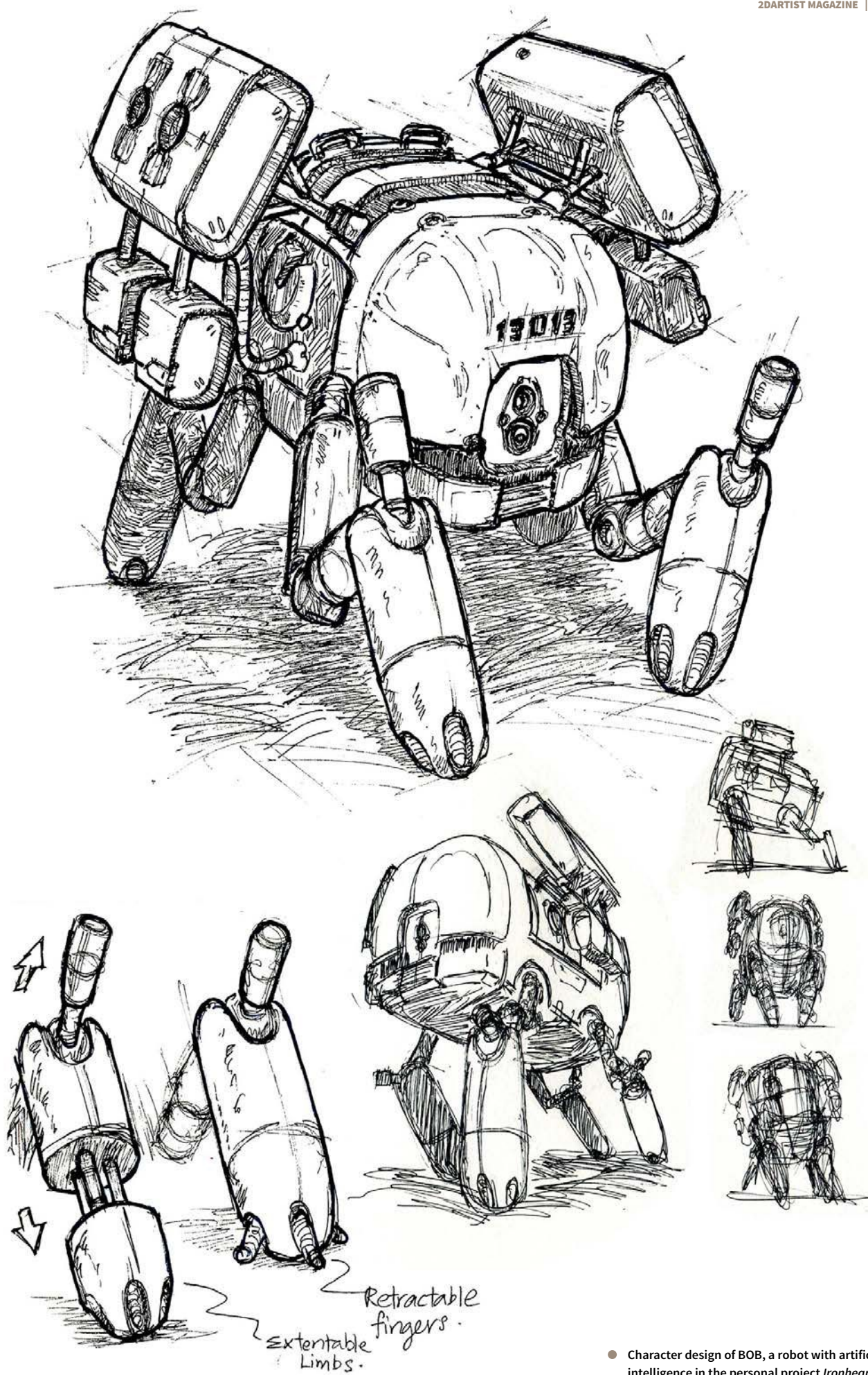
● Character design of BOB, a robot with artificial intelligence in the personal project *Ironheart*

● **Environment design explorations of Ithaca for the book**
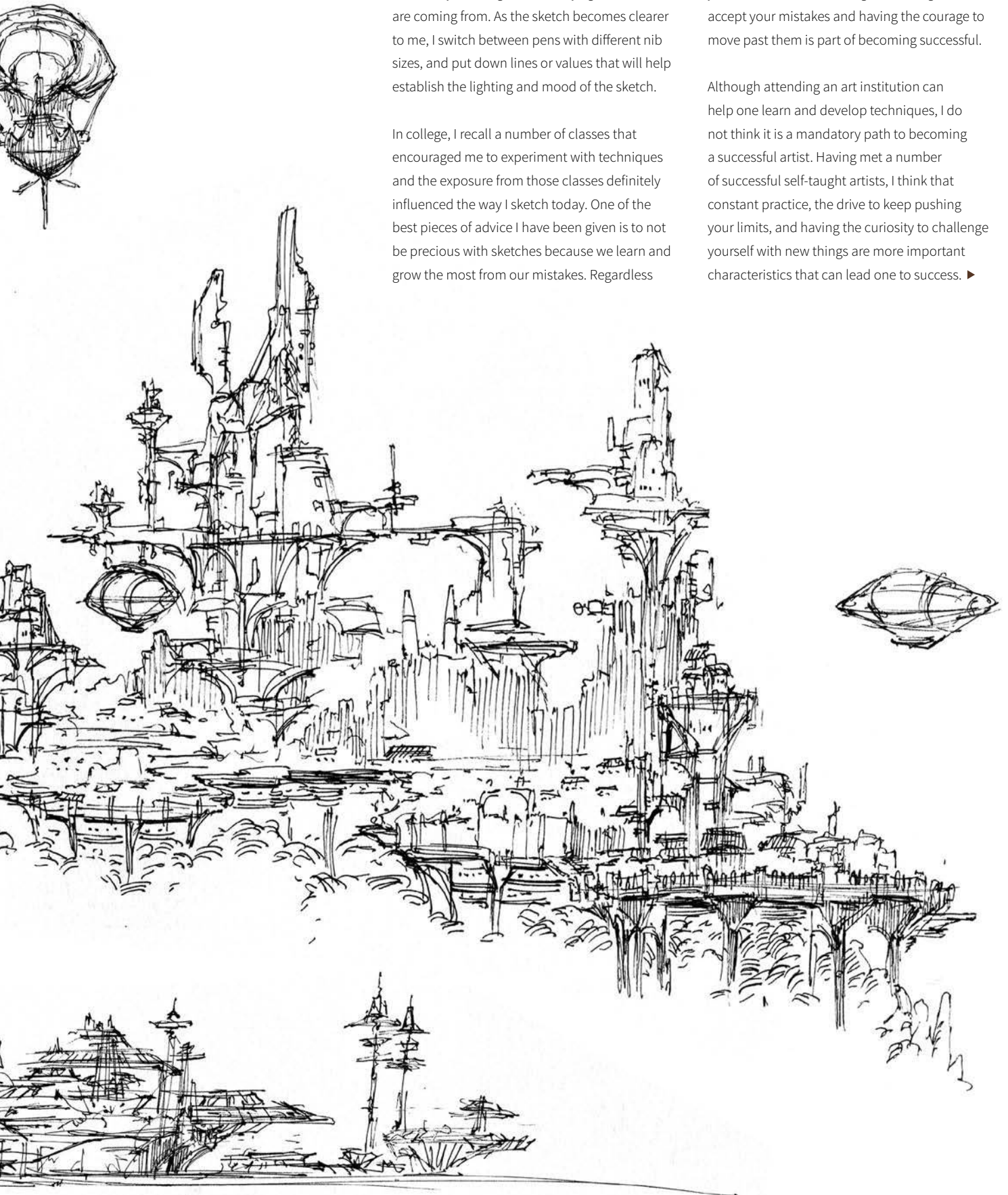*The Odyssey: Neoteric Atlas*
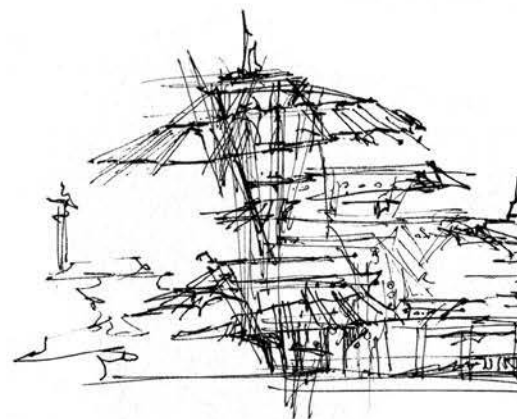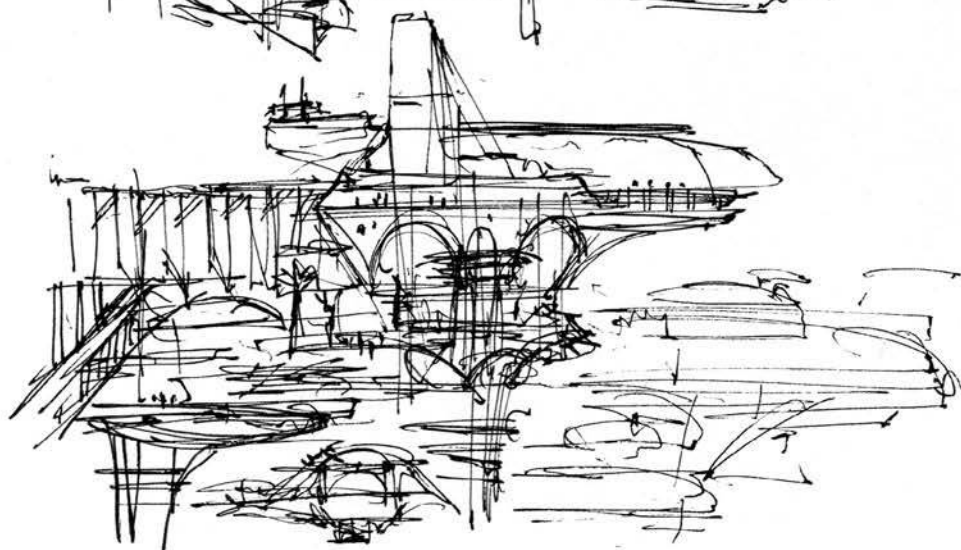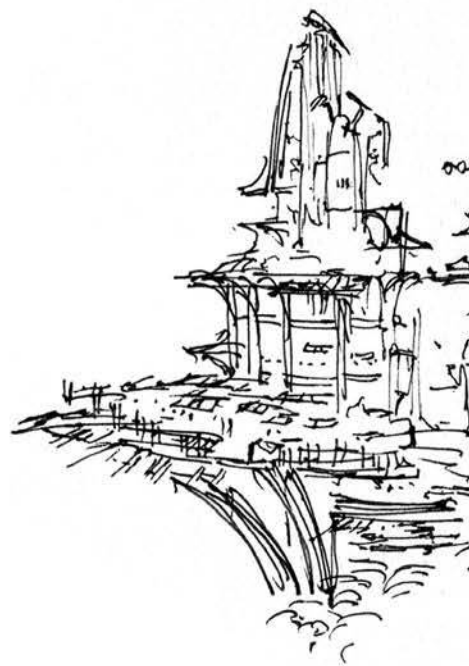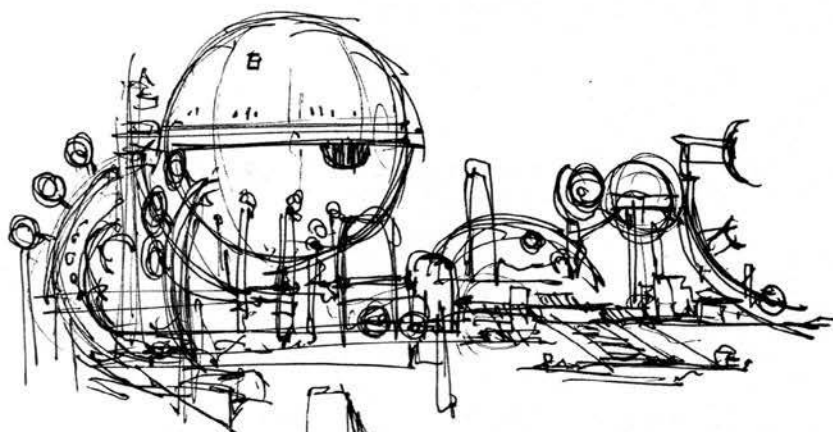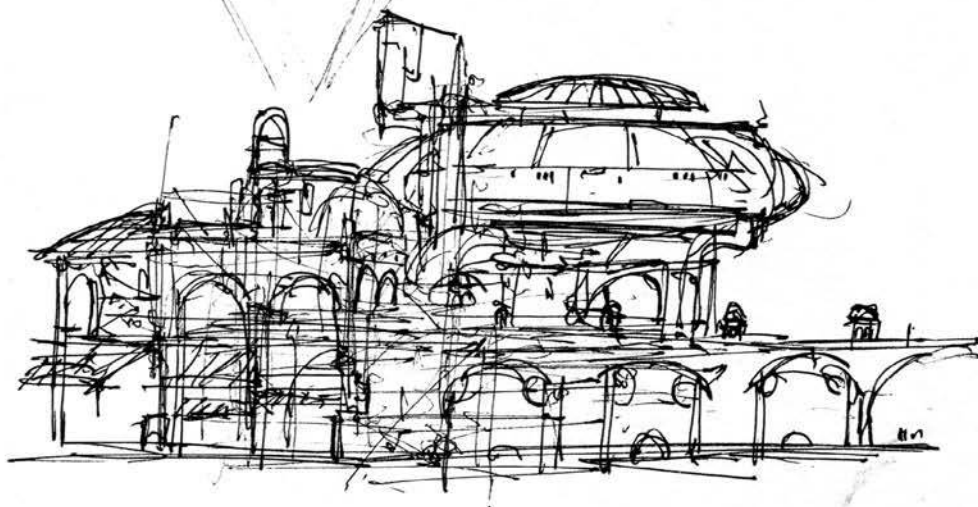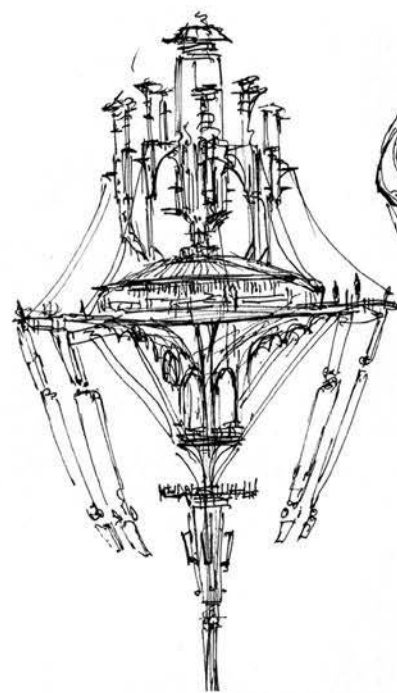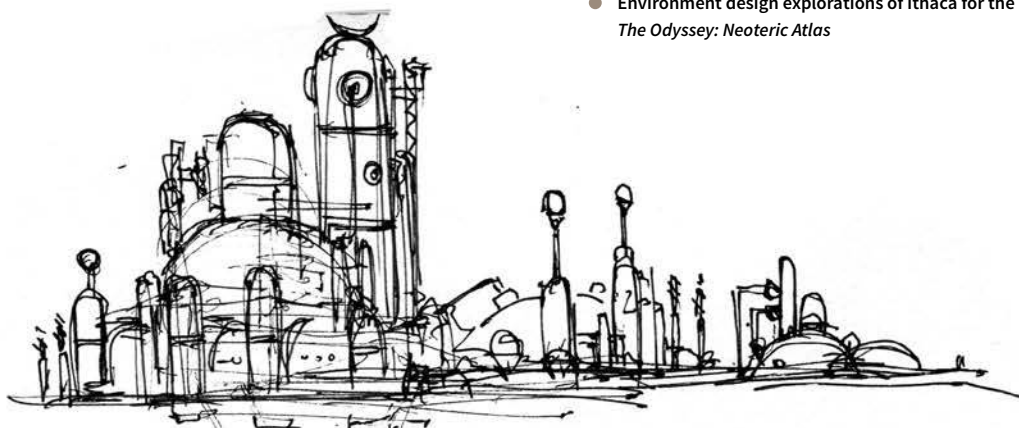
I plan where the important parts of the sketch are. While I put down these strokes, I am also constantly thinking of where my light sources are coming from. As the sketch becomes clearer to me, I switch between pens with different nib sizes, and put down lines or values that will help establish the lighting and mood of the sketch.

In college, I recall a number of classes that encouraged me to experiment with techniques and the exposure from those classes definitely influenced the way I sketch today. One of the best pieces of advice I have been given is to not be precious with sketches because we learn and grow the most from our mistakes. Regardless of how much time you have spent on a sketch, if there is something obviously wrong with it, you should not fear starting over. Being able to accept your mistakes and having the courage to move past them is part of becoming successful.

Although attending an art institution can help one learn and develop techniques, I do not think it is a mandatory path to becoming a successful artist. Having met a number of successful self-taught artists, I think that constant practice, the drive to keep pushing your limits, and having the curiosity to challenge yourself with new things are more important characteristics that can lead one to success. ▶

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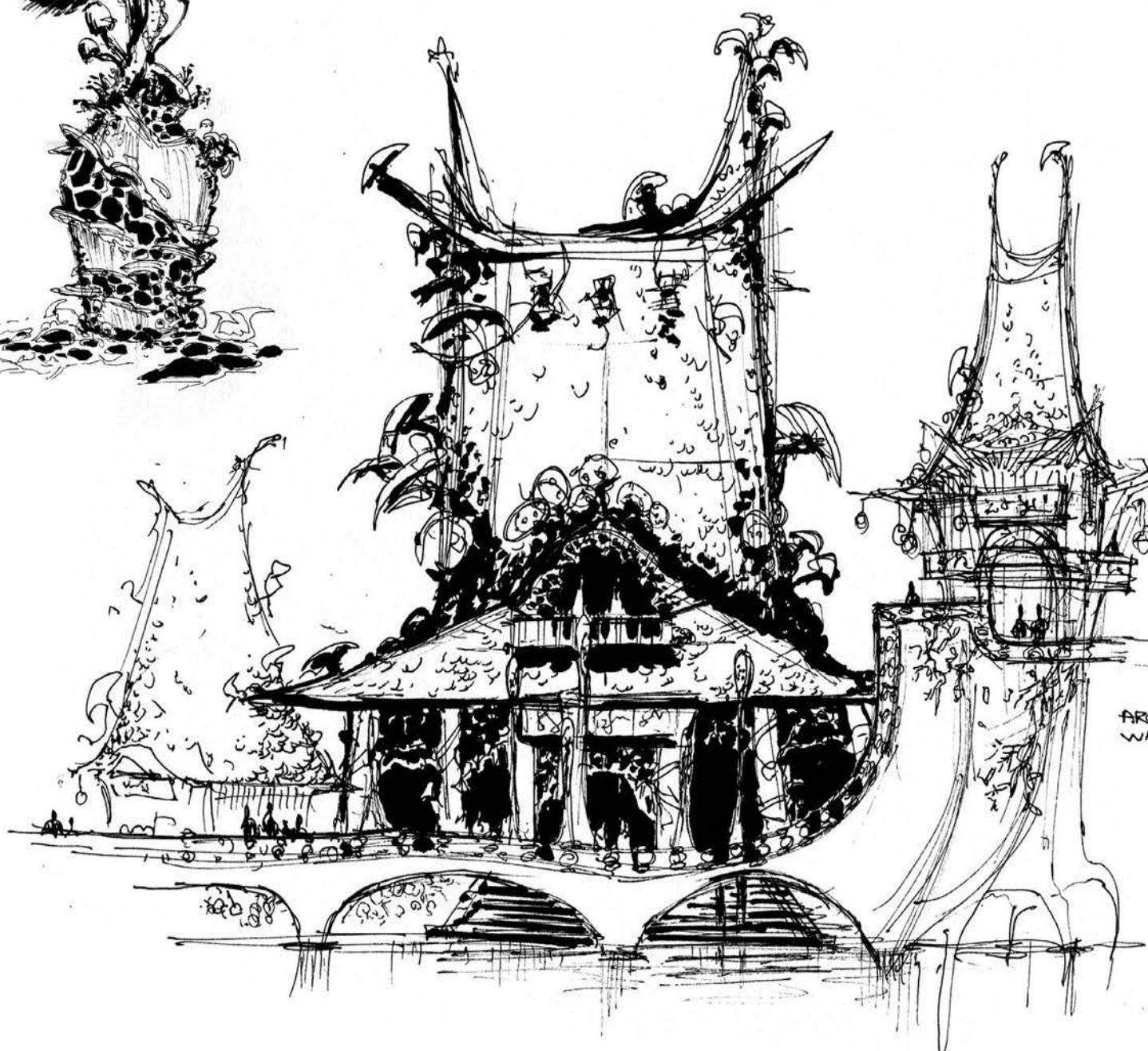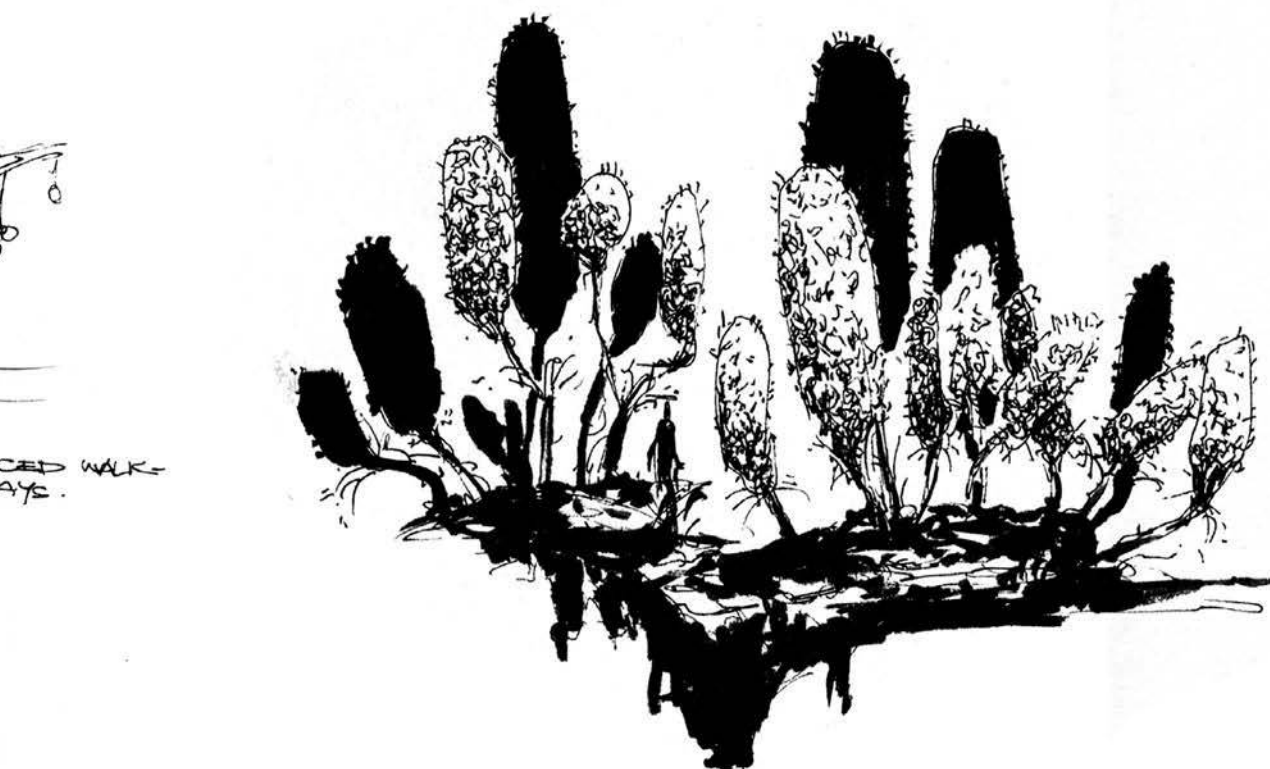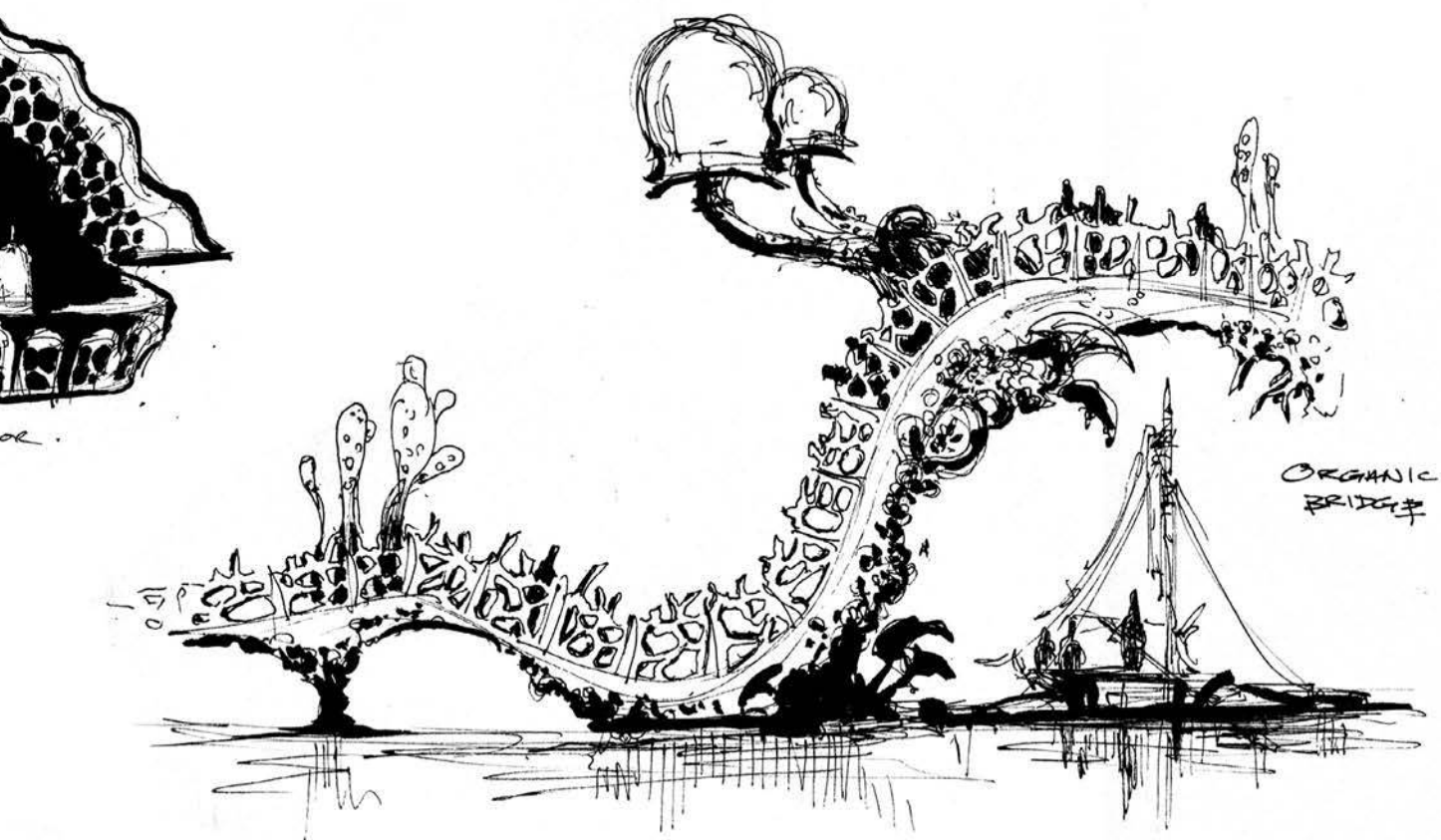
● Environment design explorations of Scheria
for the book *The Odyssey: Neoteric Atlas*

● Character design of Little guy,
a junk robot in *Ironheart*
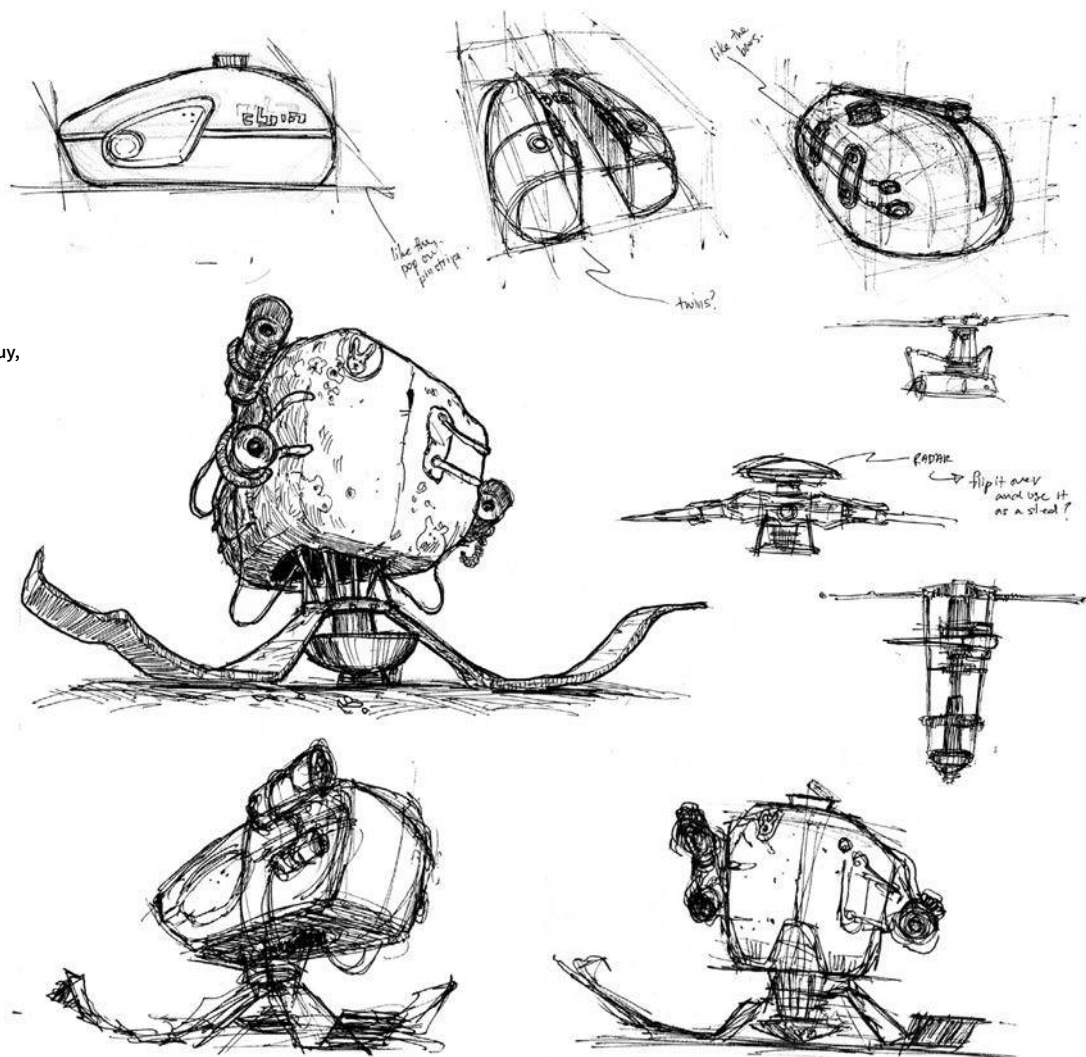
● Vehicle design explorations of
Dean's shuttle in *Ironheart*

● **Sketch of houses of Scheria for the book**
The Odyssey: Neoteric Atlas

● **An exploration of the citizens
of the junk city in** *Ironheart*

beginner's guide to
sketching:
characters, creatures & concepts

Colored shading

Learn how to shade and blend colored objects to create a 3D effect ▶

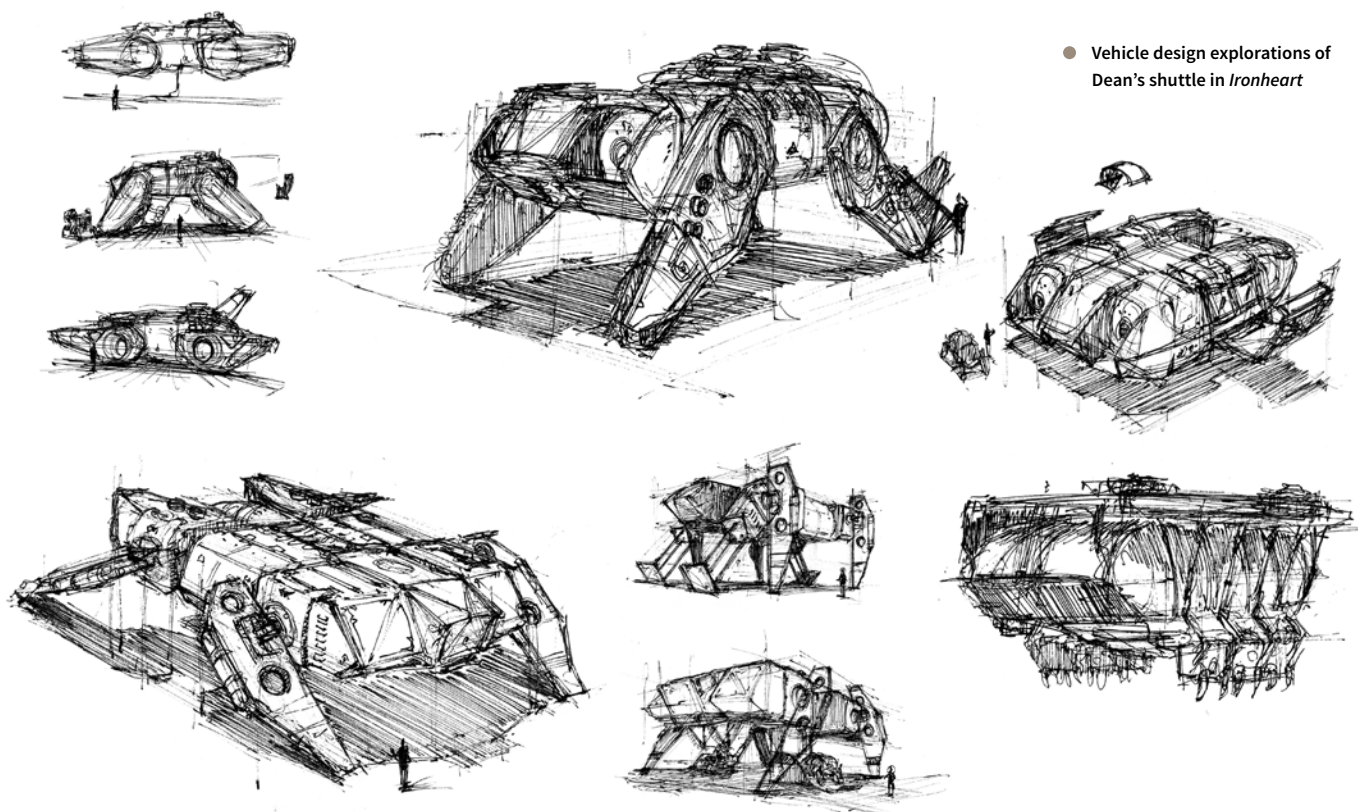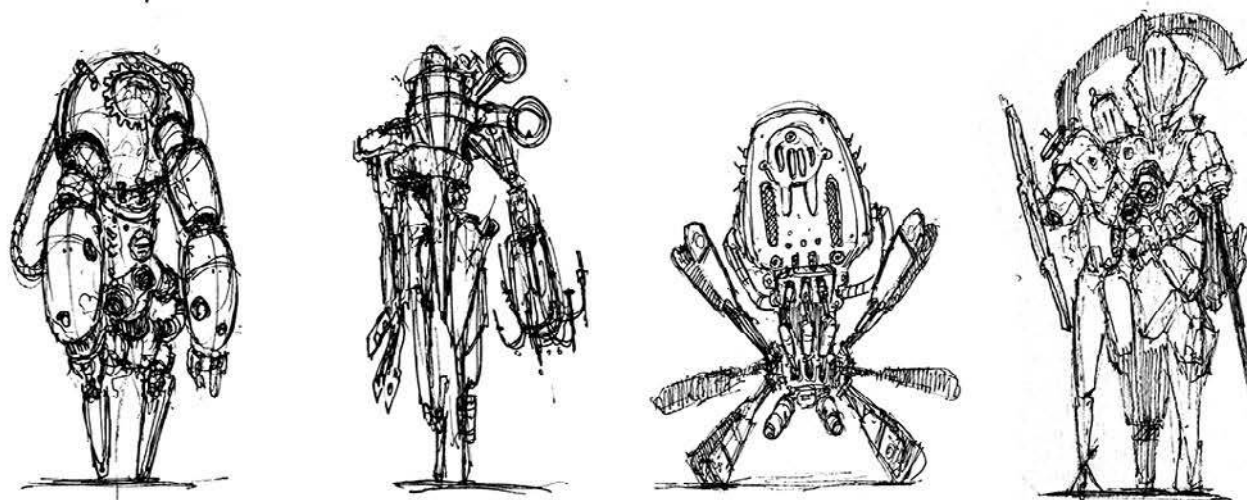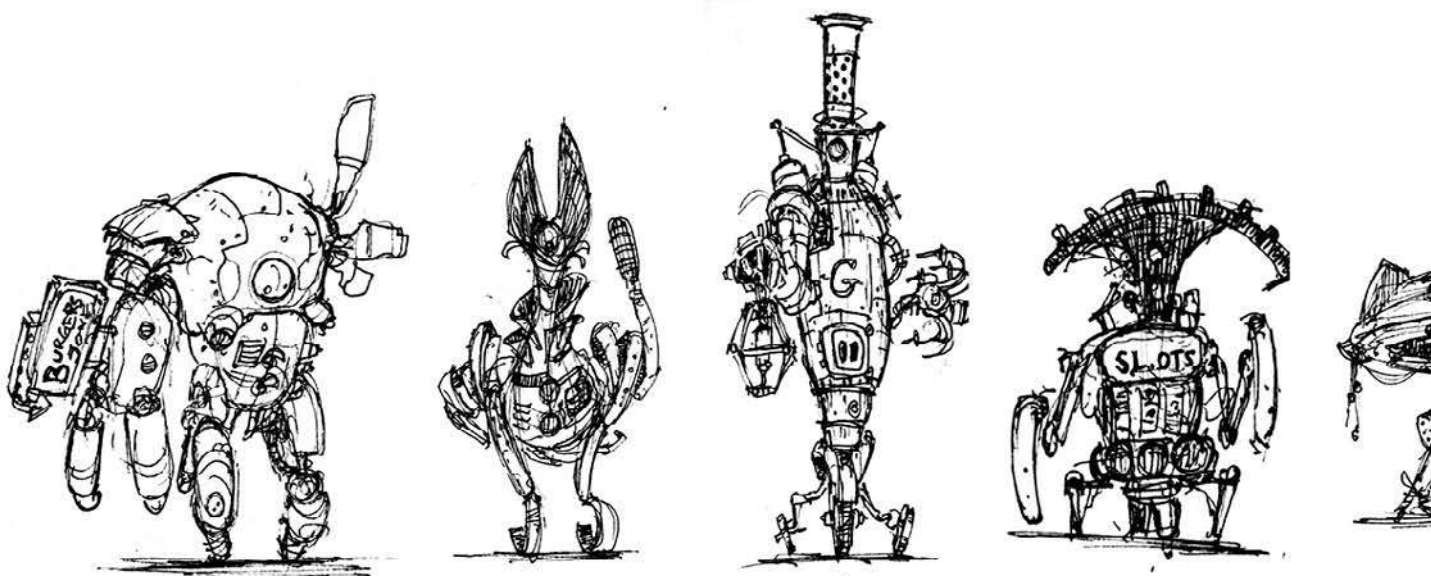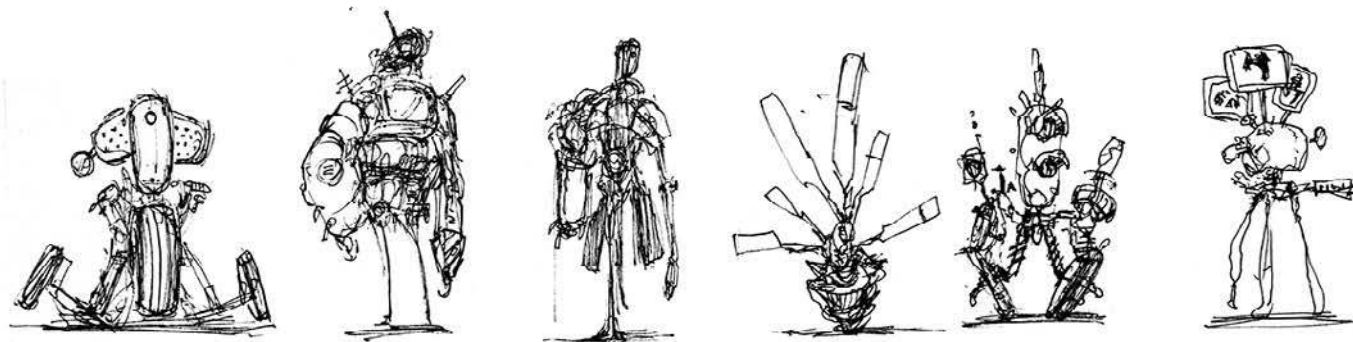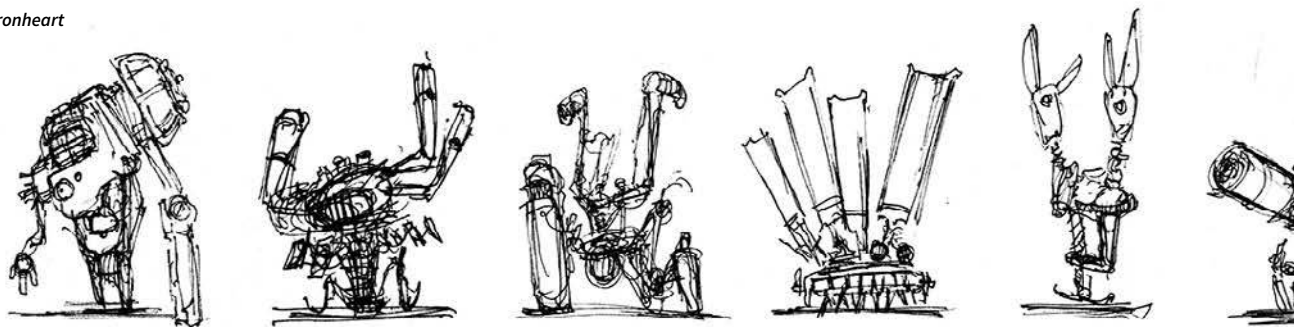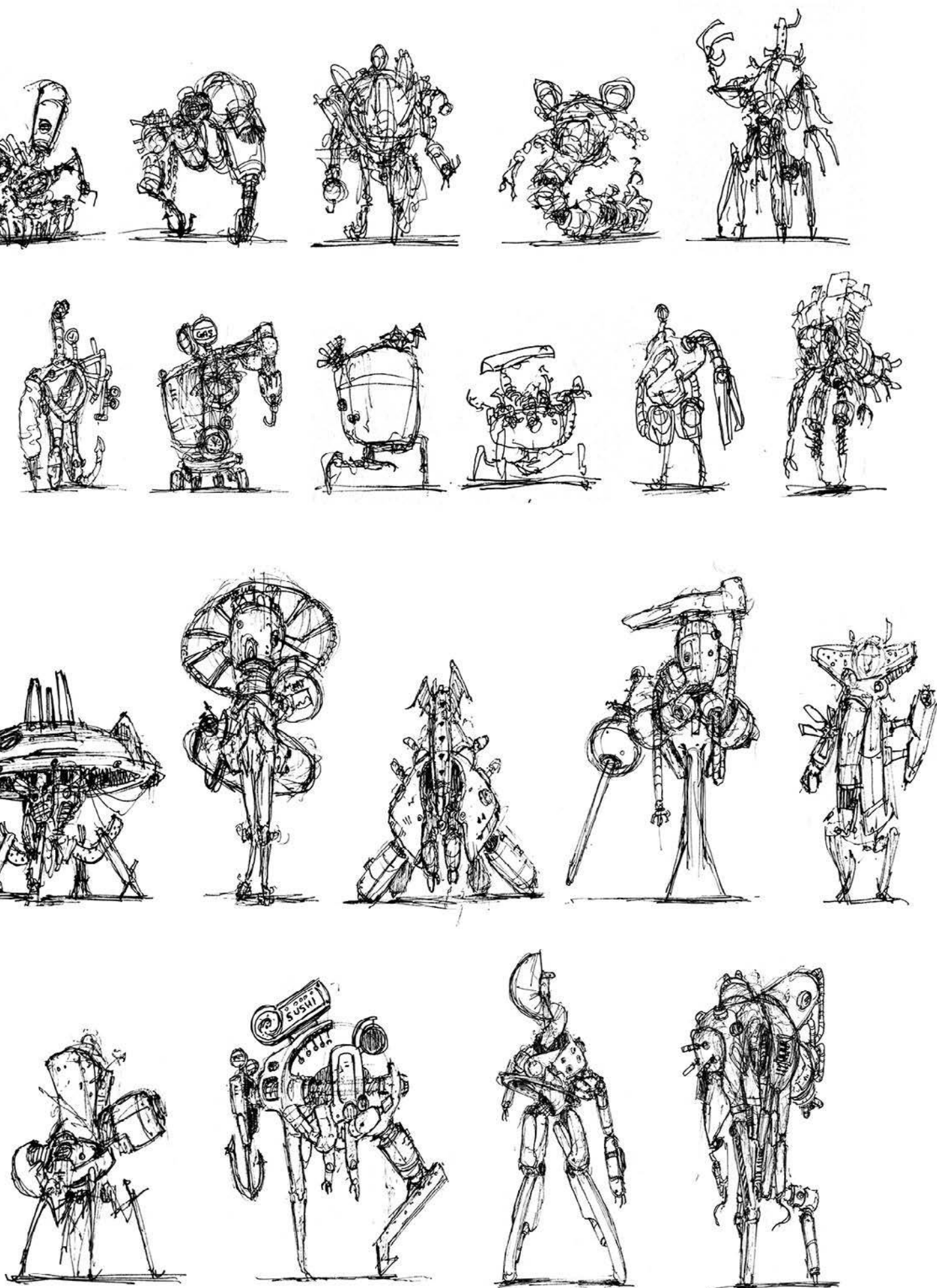Have you ever wondered how to blend colors correctly? This technique entails a few great tips and shows you how to use water-soluble colored pencils. They create a wonderful effect and handle like a traditional colored pencil, yet they dissolve and blend in water! They give you an extraordinary versatility.

Water-soluble colored pencils use gum arabic (acacia gum), which dissolves in water. If you don't have water-soluble colored pencils, you can use an alcohol (take care when using) which breaks down the wax binder in most colored pencils and allows the pigments to blend more like paint.

Blending with colored pencils requires a little bit of patience, but with all the passion you have for art, you will enjoy it for sure! Do not be afraid of using colors; instead play with them the best you can! Blending colors with water-soluble colored pencils is an amazing exercise which will help you to understand and see the colors in nature better.

01 **Sketching a circle:** Use an HB pencil in a tripod grip and sketch a circle. Remember to draw the highlights, the core shadow, and the cast shadow. In this step, you don't need to be precise, just capture the essence of your object.

02 **Adding the first colors:** Use two or three of your water soluble colored pencils to shade your object. For this step I choose violet, pink, and orange colors. Shade them gradually avoiding the highlights. Also, for a better final effect you can draw the lines on a dampened area of paper, not on dry paper (as I did).

03 **Blending colors together:** Now you can blend your colors together and create a wonderful and realistic sphere. If needed, you can wash clear water over the part of the drawing you want to work on, then pick up color from the palette or off the pencil and stroke it into the dampened paper with a brush. It will give an amazing and soft look to your drawing.

The Artist
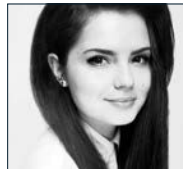
Sylwia Bomba
wandererbomba.
blogspot.co.uk

Software Used:
Photoshop

Sylwia Bomba is a digital artist and illustrator. She graduated from the Academy of Digital Arts in Florence and has since worked for Disney, Pixar and is currently Art Supervisor at Neko Productions.

01

02
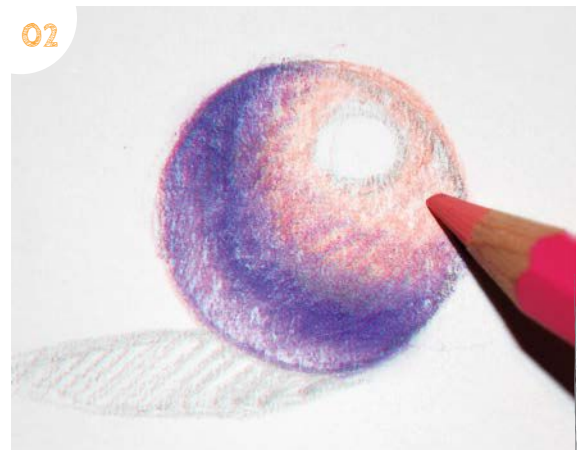
03

Textured and smooth color

Try these simple pencil drawing techniques for different ways to texture your work ▶

Creating textures or smooth color takes a little bit of practice and patience, but it's certainly worth it.

01 Hatching technique for textured color: Using a hatching technique, shade your area with a green (or any color) pencil. The brighter the area, t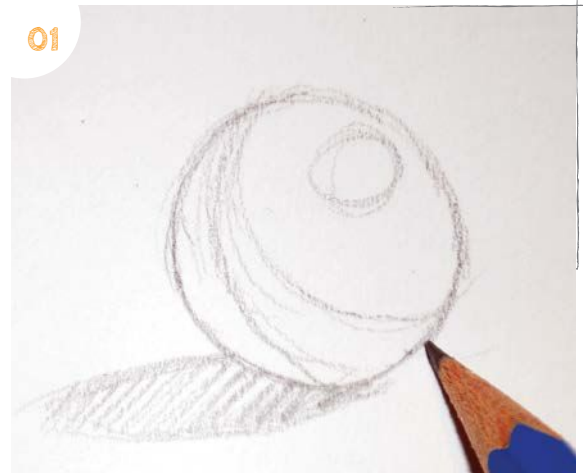he fewer lines you will sketch. It will create an amazing texture you can use in backgrounds. I love to use this method – it gives a certain appeal to your drawings**.**

02 Blending two colors: You can add a brighter green (or a brighter version of your chosen color) next to the original and blend those colors with a blending stick. As mentioned in the previous quick tip, if you want to blend them more and you don't have any water-soluble coloring pencils, you can blend them using an alcohol which breaks down the waxy material of normal pencils. Be careful with the alcohol though!
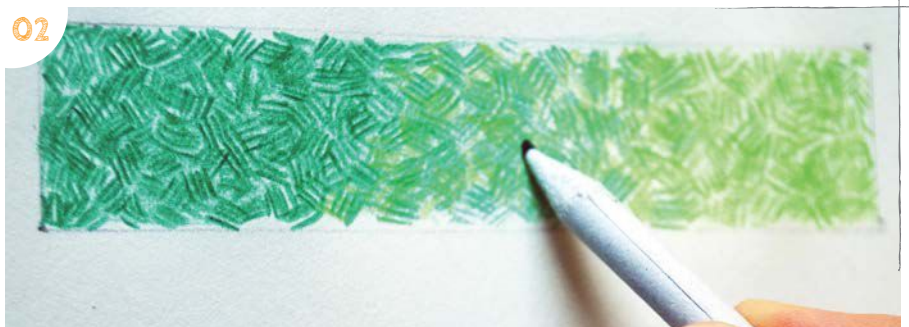
03 Shading one smooth color: If you don't want to use a hatching technique, you can shade softly with one of your colors. For example, pick a blue pencil and start to draw the darkest areas. Holding your colored pencil in a basic tripod grip, make tight circular motions. This helps to build up soft layers of color.

04 Blending smooth colors: For the brightest areas, shade with the side of your colored pencil in an extended tripod grip. Do not apply too much pressure but decrease it while sketching the brightest areas.

If you want to add the second color, you need to do the same thing you did with the first color, but going in the opposite direction. This will blend the smooth tones seamlessly together.

Fair skin

See how layering techniques and color contrasts can create a realistic skin tone ▶

Have you ever had problems with blending skin tones? Each beginner has to struggle with this difficult and varied topic. But with a little bit of practice you will see how easy it is!

01 Choosing the first colors: If you look closely to the color of your skin you will see a lot of colors. The palette depends on the lighting but you will mostly see reds, yellows, blues, and a little bit of green in fair skin. Carefully choose your water-soluble colored pencils and prepare your paper for the next step!

02 Creating the first layer of color: For light skin, the base color will be a yellowy one (more like sepia). Add it carefully, because as you know, this is not the only color we see and it's not as visible! You need to leave space for other layers such as pink, white, or red.
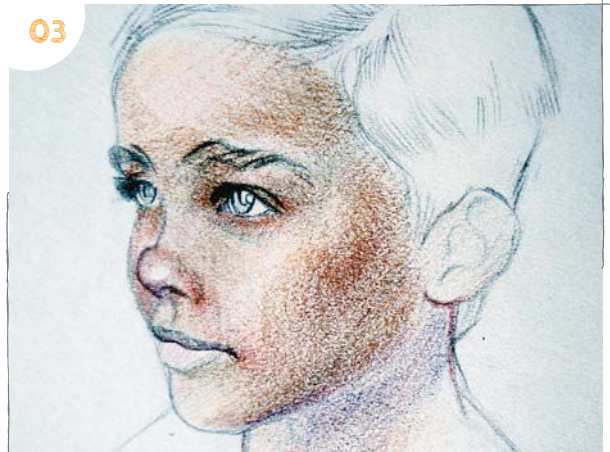
03 Adding blues under the eyes: If you look closely, you have some areas in your body with quite different tones of colors, for example under the eyes the blood vessels change the thinner skin to more of a blue/green while your cheeks are a little bit redder. Always pay attention to those colors and ask yourself why they change.

04 Blending colors together: I blot the brush to remove most of the water before blending and use a light pressure to blend the colors. In this step I add one layer of red and pink colors. For tiny details you can dip a brush into clean water, stroke the brush against the pencil, and brush color onto dry paper.
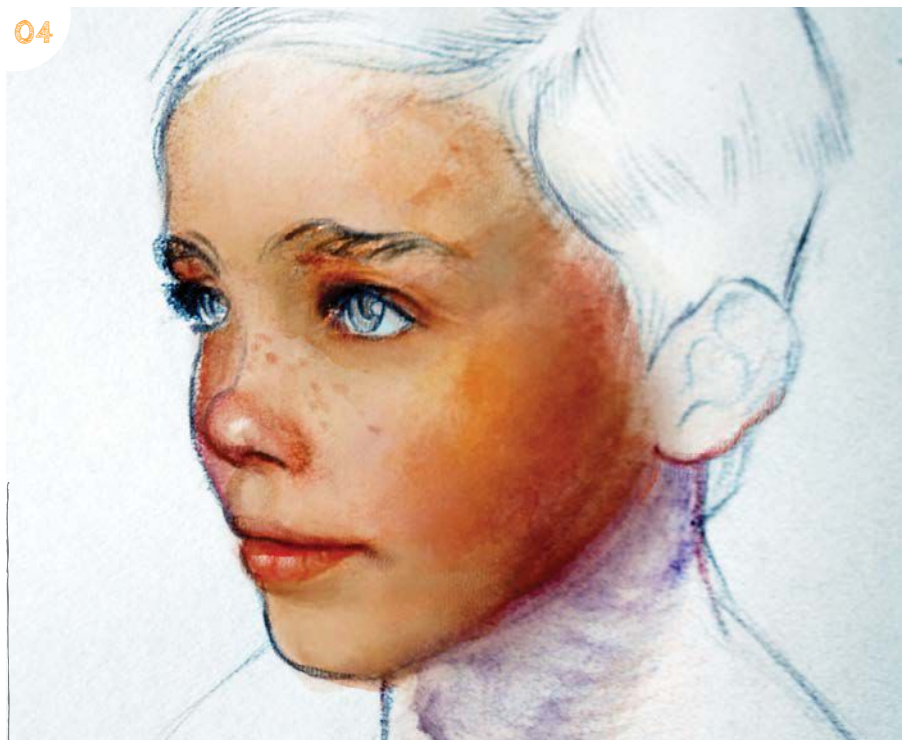
Colored landscapes

Learn to sketch with water-soluble colored pencils to create a realistic landscape ▶

I will show you how to create a realistic landscape, using water-soluble colored pencils. At the beginning it doesn't look perfect, but you will see the magic happen once you apply the water to your sketch.

01 Sketching first shapes: Using an HB graphite pencil in a tripod grip, sketch the first shapes of your mountains. When you are using water-soluble colored pencils, do not use graphite pencil grades higher than HB, otherwise the graphite pencil line will dissolve with the colors and look unclean.

02 First colors: Apply color as you would with a traditional colored pencil - the more color you apply, the more intense the value will be. Keep the pencil point sharp and hold your tool at a low angle (not perpendicular to the paper). Don't be afraid of colors! For the sky you can use not only a blue pencil, but also yellow, green, purple, or pink ones!

03 Blending clouds: Brush clean water over the color to dissolve and blend it. The more you stroke water over water or the heavier pressure you use, the more the color will be moved around. When blending colors, always start from the brightest areas and move to the darkest.

04 Creating depth in your image: I use light pressure for each area and blend the darkest tones with a circular motion. When the paper is dry, you can add more colors if needed. Remember, the farthest mountain will be the palest color you will see! The closest mountains in the middle ground and foreground will have more contrast.

Art **Gallery**

Each issue the 2dartist team selects 10 of the best digital images from around the world. Enjoy!

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Denis Istomin

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Albert Ramon Puig
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Christian Dimitrov
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Speed paint
mystical earth magic

See how you can quickly create an Eastern inspired scene featuring magic oozing from the earth ▶

The Artist

Peter Goethe
petergoethe.tumblr.com

Software Used:
Photoshop

Peter Goethe is a freelance artist and illustrator living and working in Hamburg, Germany. He loves to create speed paintings and share his illustrations and artworks.

Use bright brushstrokes and light effects to create a sense of mystery and magic...

In this tutorial I will speed paint a Middle Eastern inspired fantasy scene showing earth magic. I will show you how to work with your imagination and create an interesting speed painting with simple methods. Imagination is an important aspect for every artist. Through the years I have found that only your imagination and ideas can make you a good artist. You can have the best skills, but what makes you really interesting is your potential to create your own worlds, and let your personality shine through your works.

But how can you train your imagination? I think speed painting is a good way and you can practice by joining a speed painting group on Facebook (I'm in the "Daily Spitpaint" group). There are always new topics and new artworks posted every day. I think it's important to confront yourself with topics you haven't worked with before, and such a group gives you a good opportunity for this. If you only work on your own topics, there is the risk that you will repeat yourself and stop developing.

I'm also of the opinion that reading good books and magazines help you to develop and strengthen your imagination. If you just watch movies, animations and look at artworks you will only copy the styles of other people, but if you read you will train your brain to invent new images and ideas. Last but not least go out and look at the world with your own eyes. Look at things that could be boring for others, perhaps they just don't see the real beauty in it and it is your chance to show it to the world.

01 **Inspiration and fast sketches:** Before I start painting I like to think about the topic I am working with, and understand how I want to realize it. I also look for some inspiration on the internet or from other artist's work, who already work with the same topic. Collect different impressions and make many sketches to visualize your ideas and understand what is really interesting you. Sometimes you just don't know how to start, so if you have a block, don't be afraid of it, just start sketching something. Your first idea is most of the time not going to become the final image. Thinking

before you start to work is useful, but don't think too much, as it can inhibit you. Start with sketching and let your subconscious work for you; it can do more than you think.

02 **Designing the composition:** Choose the most interesting sketch and try to turn it into a full composition. I want to place the scene into an Eastern setting, like *1001 Nights*. I think the desert is a good place to work with earth magic effects. Rocks, sand and stones make a good mood for this topic. In my speed painting I want to show a Bedouin man in the foreground waiting with a camel on a hill, while his master is confronted with a magic cave beneath.

When you start sketching your work, think about the layers. Split your layers into a foreground

● Start sketching your ideas with fast strokes

01

middle-ground and background. Put the figures and shapes on the correct layers from the beginning to make your workflow easier, and give you the chance to change things faster without any problems. Sketch the shapes, but don't be too precise; we will work the details out later. This is just a base, on which you will build the rest of your painting.

> **"Put the earth magic scene at the back, to make the narrative part of the painting more mysterious"**

03 **First colors:** If your sketch is ready, go on to the colors. Take a wide, rough brush and set colors on the objects and layers. Create the main color mood that your artwork

● Sketch all the shapes on different layers

02

will contain. My plan is to put the earth magic scene at the back, to make the narrative part of the painting more mysterious. Something happens further away, but we don't really know what it is. We are just the observers, like the Bedouin and his camel in the front, but they seem to know more about it.

Some of the Old Masters, for example the Dutch Renaissance artist Pieter Brueghel the Elder, also used this trick. It makes the painting more interesting and gives the viewer different ways to read it. I really like it when the painting contains skill and an interesting story; like a good song that has a great melody and good lyrics.

04 **Lights in the foreground:** Now go back to the foreground. Take a smaller brush and start to set brighter colors on the camel and the sitting Bedouin. In my painting the light is coming from the right side and falls on the backs of both figures and the sand beneath them. I paint these elements in warm colors, as the sky in the background has a cold and a dark color. A bright and warm color will bring the objects to the front and make them appear more important. On the back of the camel I make a colorful seat.

I think it is important to learn how to use light and dark contrasts and also warm and cold contrasts. You can make things come to the foreground if you set more contrast on them, so add lights and shadows. You can also make things go to the back, if you make the colors colder. I will show this in the next step with the background.

05 **Background, mountains and skies:** To make the desert appear wide I create a mountain chain in the back. The mountains also underline the main rock, where the magic takes place. I keep the background in cold, dark monotone colors, but because of this the figures and shapes in the foreground need more work. I also don't want the sky to be too simple, so I give the clouds some more shape. To do this take a wide brush and make some fast strokes, not forgetting to keep all your elements on different layers.

I also correct some parts of the magic rock. Try to work in every part of your work; don't concentrate too much on the figures and elements. The painting has to grow from all sides at once. ▶

● Start coloring the shapes with your key colors
03
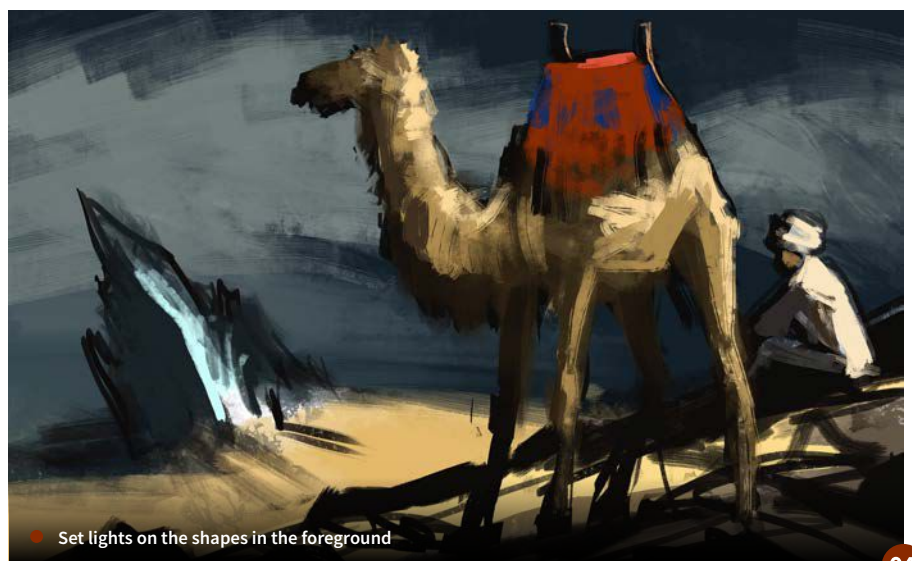
● Set lights on the shapes in the foreground
04
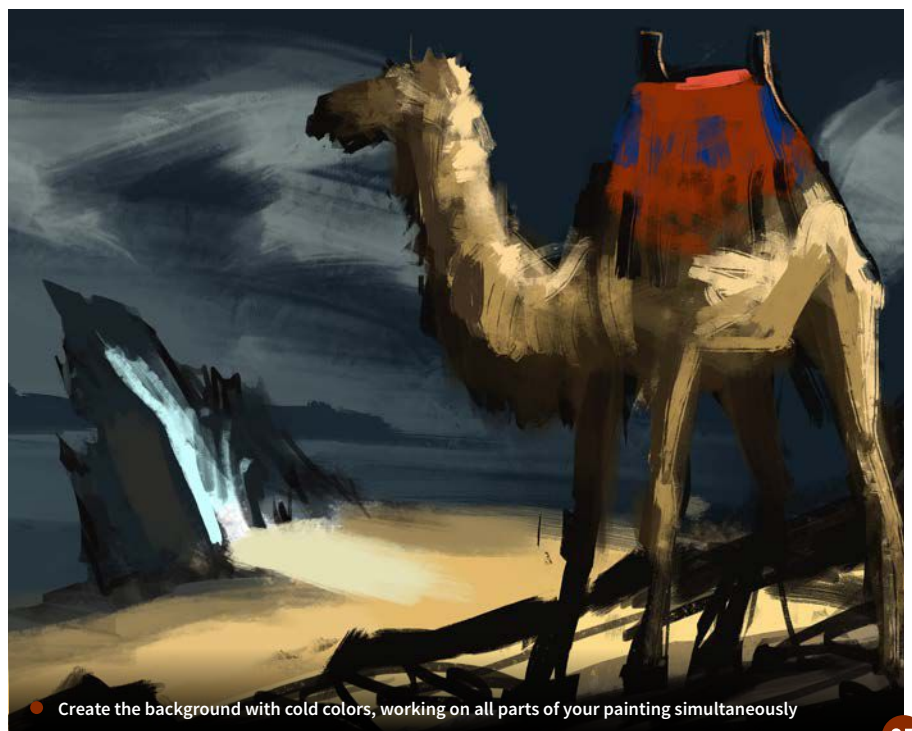
● Create the background with cold colors, working on all parts of your painting simultaneously
05

> "Take an eraser and start to make lines between the shapes, and so stones will start to appear"

06 **Rocks and figures:** Going back to the foreground, I want to make the stony earth beneath the camel and the Bedouin more precise. I already have some rough shapes painted there, so I go on working with them. Take an eraser and start to make lines between the shapes, and so stones will start to appear.

Make them a bit sharper, using the Lasso tool. Now create a new layer, put it on the stone shapes, and paint the lower part of the stones with a cold color. Now take a brighter color and on the same layer, paint the upper part of the stones. Now you can see the effect of the upper stones in the sun, while the lower are in a shadow.

Continue with the camel and the Bedouin, making more details and contrasts on both figures. I add some more colors to the seat on the camel, giving more detail to the shape. Work now on the Bedouin, but don't do too much work on this figure. Although he is in the foreground, he is not the focal point, so leave him painted freely. Some shadows beneath them will be fine.

07 **Clouds and stars:** Time is short, so let's start finishing things. The Old Masters worked from the back to the front of the painting, so we will do it now also. Let's finish the sky. Take a brush with soft edges and paint the clouds. Let them grow brighter to the top, but don't set

Returning to the foreground, work on the stones and refine the camel and the Bedouin

06

Make clouds with a soft brush and let the stars shine in your skies

07

Make the cave more precise and let it become a magic place
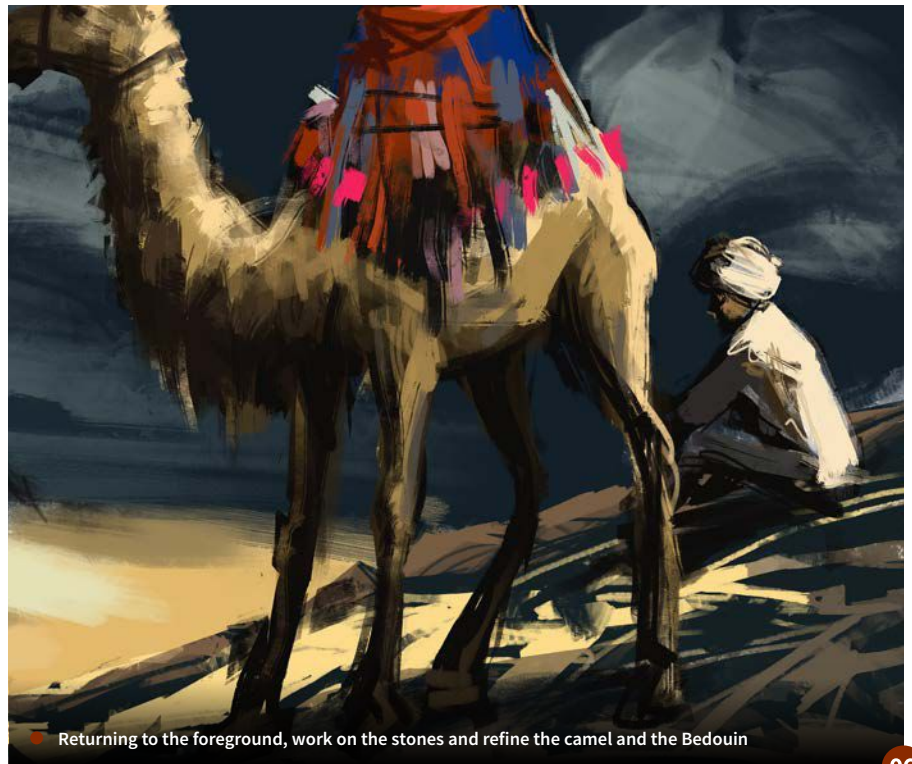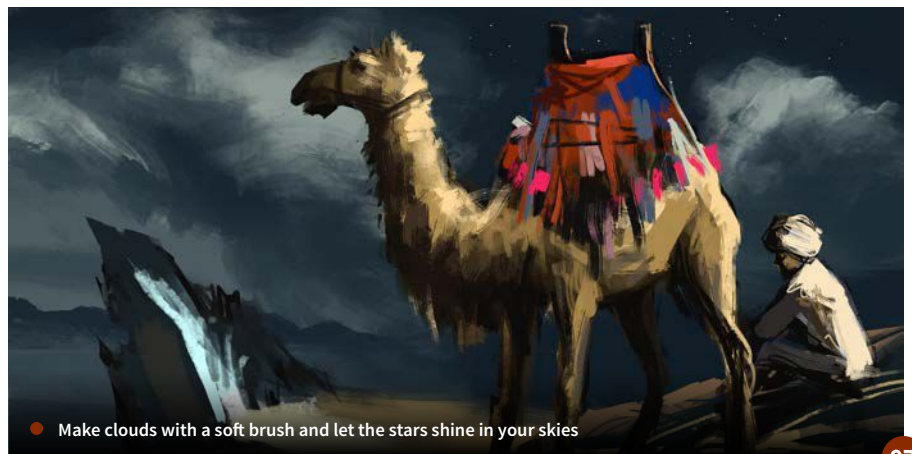
08

to much contrast in them or make their form too dynamic; you don't want your background to come closer and disturb the composition.

In this painting I want the viewer to be confused about whether it is daytime or night time. This mysterious atmosphere fits really well with the magic topic. To make that effect stronger, put stars in the background of the sky.

You can use a star brush or, if you don't have one, set some little points with a round hard brush and copy them so you have a shower of stars. Now the sky looks much deeper.

08 The middle-ground and magic cave: So far we have worked a lot with the background and foreground, but now the middle-ground, where the main scene takes place, needs work. Define the magic cave where the earth opens a bit like in the story of *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*; when someone says "Open Sesame."

Make the edges of the rock sharper, so it seems more like a dangerous place. Work with cold and dark colors in blue and brown. Take a sharp brush and set a bright blue light in the middle of the rock. Now use a soft round brush to make a few accurate strokes in front of the entrance. It looks like magic light is shining out of it. If light comes out of the cave, it is thrown on the sand, so take a brighter color for the sand and paint it near the entrance.

09 Finishing the foreground: We don't have much time left, so let's finish the foreground. Set a few more lines on the Bedouin figure to make him more precise. Then concentrate on the camel, as it is the main figure and eye-catching in the painting.

Take a small brush and start to paint the details, keeping your strokes free, and try not to make them look too clean. A fast brushstroke gives a fur effect and makes the camel look alive. Make some brighter fur strokes to the neck and legs of the camel, so you have the feeling that the light falling near the camel is reflecting off his fur.

Set some more colors on the Bedouin's seat too. I keep colors shining and set more details and pattern on the seat, so it gets an interesting traditional look. I also make some darker shadows under the camel and the Bedouin

and little changes to the stones on the ground. Now I'm content with the foreground.

10 Finishing the scene: So now we can finish the main scene. To make the light emitting from the cave more realistic, take a small hard brush and paint strokes of bright light on the rocks. Now it looks like the bright light is reflecting on them. Then create a new layer and paint a small wizard figure, holding a magic wand in up to the sky.

Put another layer behind and set a small light glowing up from his magic wand. With so much light coming out of the cave, do not forget to paint a big shadow beneath the figure. Paint it with a fast stroke on another layer. You can also make the effect of sand blowing in the wind behind him to make the sense of the desert environment stronger. Now the painting is done! I hope you have enjoyed this earth magic tutorial. I wish you good luck with painting and trying out your new knowledge! ●

● Finish details on the camel and make the seat look traditional

09
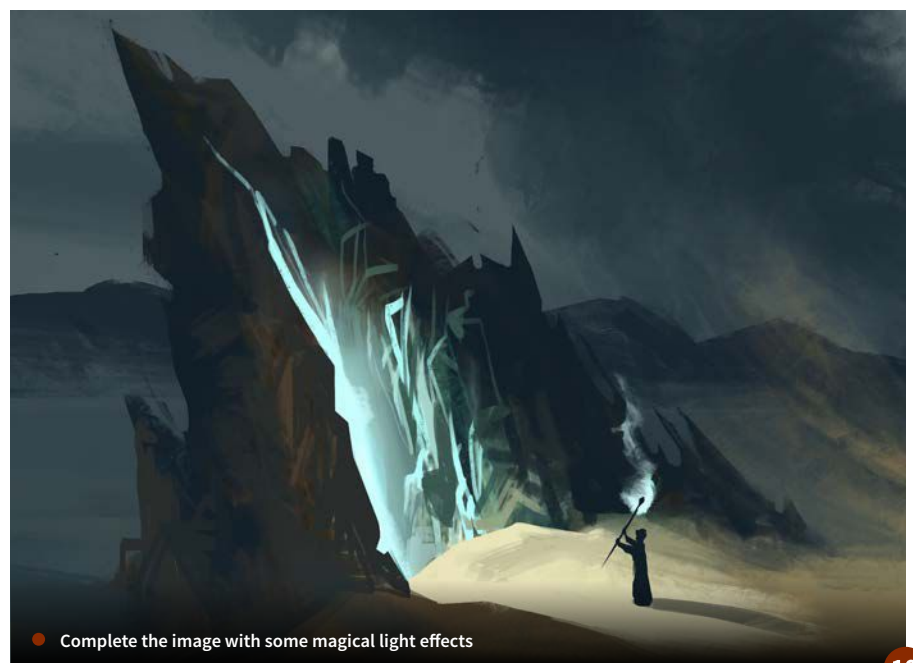
● Complete the image with some magical light effects

10

The Artist

Peter Goethe
petergoethe.tumblr.com

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sci-fi & fantasy

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CHARACTERS

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ART Fundamentals

Anatomy of the head and face

Illustrator Matt Smith demonstrates how to accurately structure and draw human anatomy in this extract from *Art Fundamentals* ▶

The Artist

Matt Smith
mattksmith.blogspot.co.uk

Software Used:
Photoshop

Matt Smith is a freelance illustrator and concept artist specializing in the anatomy of humans and animals. Matt also creates realistic animal portraits in graphite and oil paint.
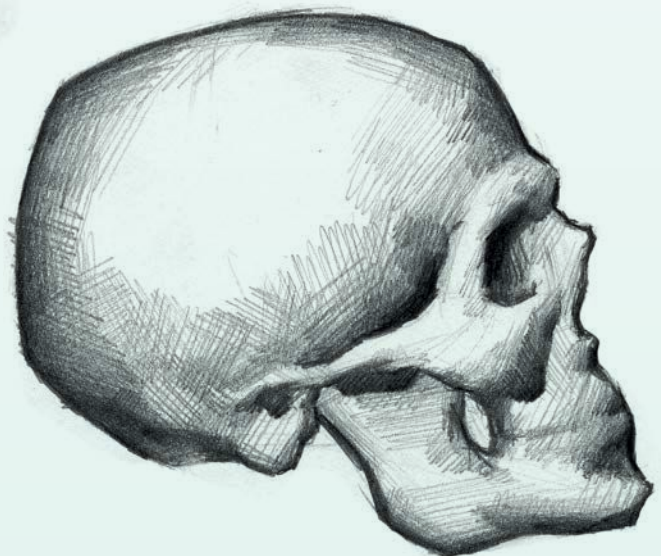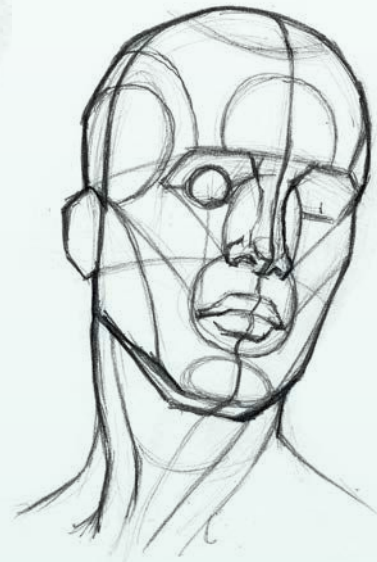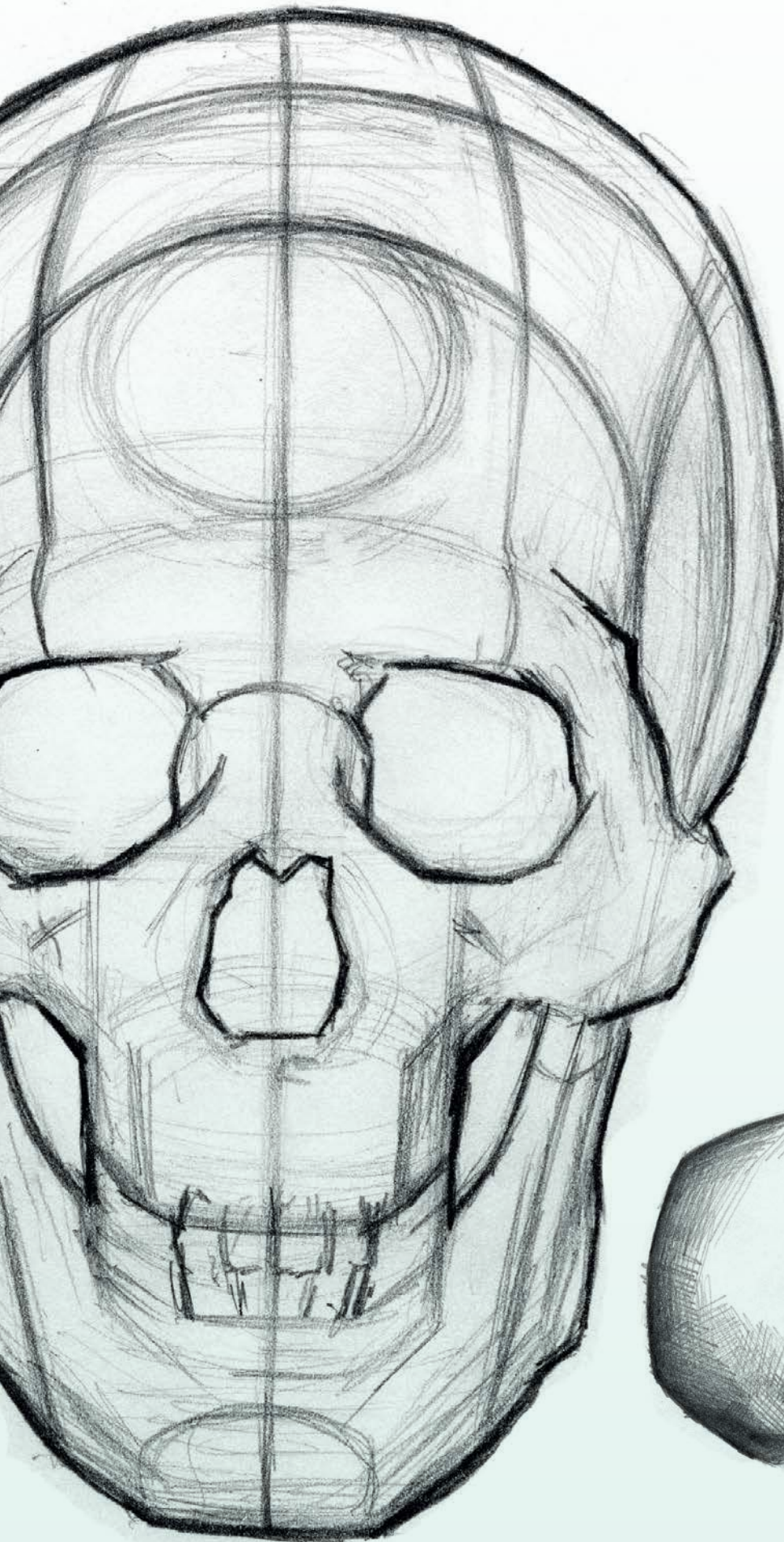
The Head

Here I want to demonstrate the structure of the head rather than the anatomy, as I cover the anatomy more thoroughly in the Facial Expressions sections.

There are several ways to start out drawing a head. One may start by drawing a circle and adding a jaw, or even drawing a basic shape of the head. Personally, I like to draw a basic shape that matches the model that I am drawing. After I have my basic shape, I then locate the sections of the face.

The face is divided into three sections: the chin to the bottom of the nose; the bottom of the nose to the brow; and the brow to the hair line (Fig.01). These sections are not always divided evenly; for example, some people may have a longer nose, making the middle section longer. This proportion all depends on your model's face type and the character that you may want to portray.

After I have found these sections, I then locate the ear. Generally speaking, the ear is found within the middle section, where the top of the
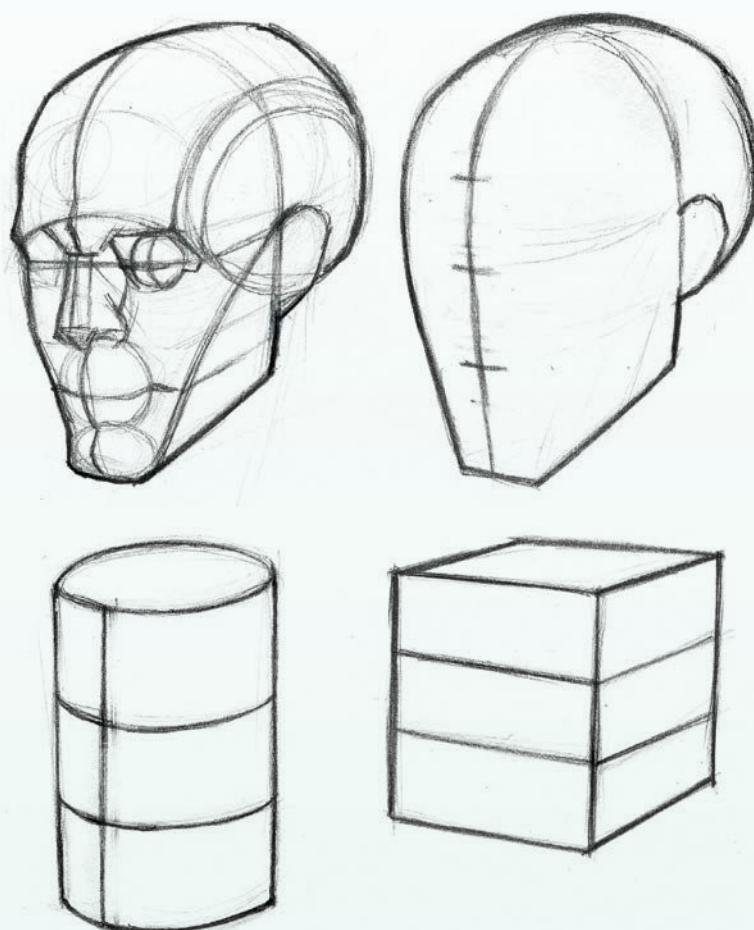
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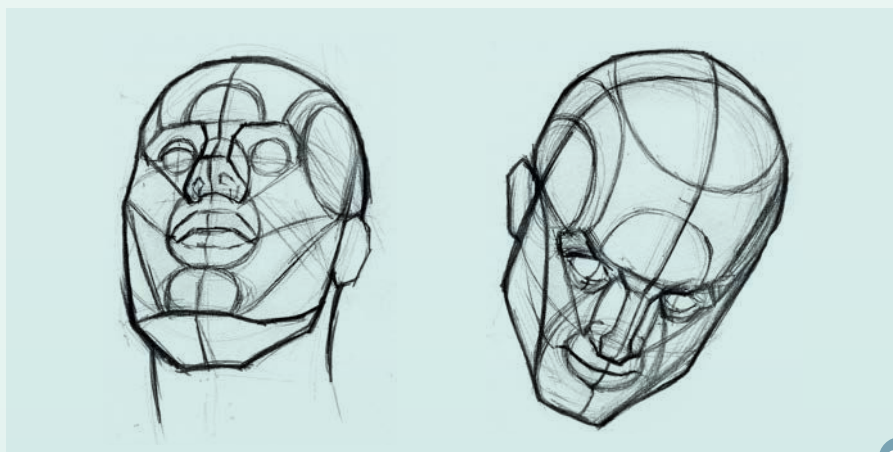
03

ear lines up with the brow and the bottom of the ear lines up with the bottom of the nose.

The ears are located on the side of the head, so perspective becomes more important (actually perspective is always important when drawing, just more so for the head). If you have a hard time lining up the ears correctly, try visualizing the head as a cylinder with lines wrapping around, or as a cube with lines going back in space.

Fig.02 – 03 show a collection of head sketches, drawn from a variety of angles. It's important to note that those drawings with the more extreme perspective show the ears either above or below where you would normally expect them. Typically this can be difficult to draw, but understanding the structure of the head will make it much easier.

Much of the structure of the head is influenced by the shape of the skull. Fig.04 shows a selection of skulls from various perspectives. I cannot recommend enough the importance of studying and drawing from real-life skulls, as it will make understanding the head so much easier.

Many of the structure lines I have used here can also be used when drawing heads as the skull effectively determines the contours of the head. Note the domed top, with slightly concave depressions on the sides of the dome at the front. This bone then funnels out a little towards the front to form the eye sockets and cheekbones. The bottom of the skull is more angular. The exact shape of the jaw will largely depend on the gender of your subject and their natural bone structure.
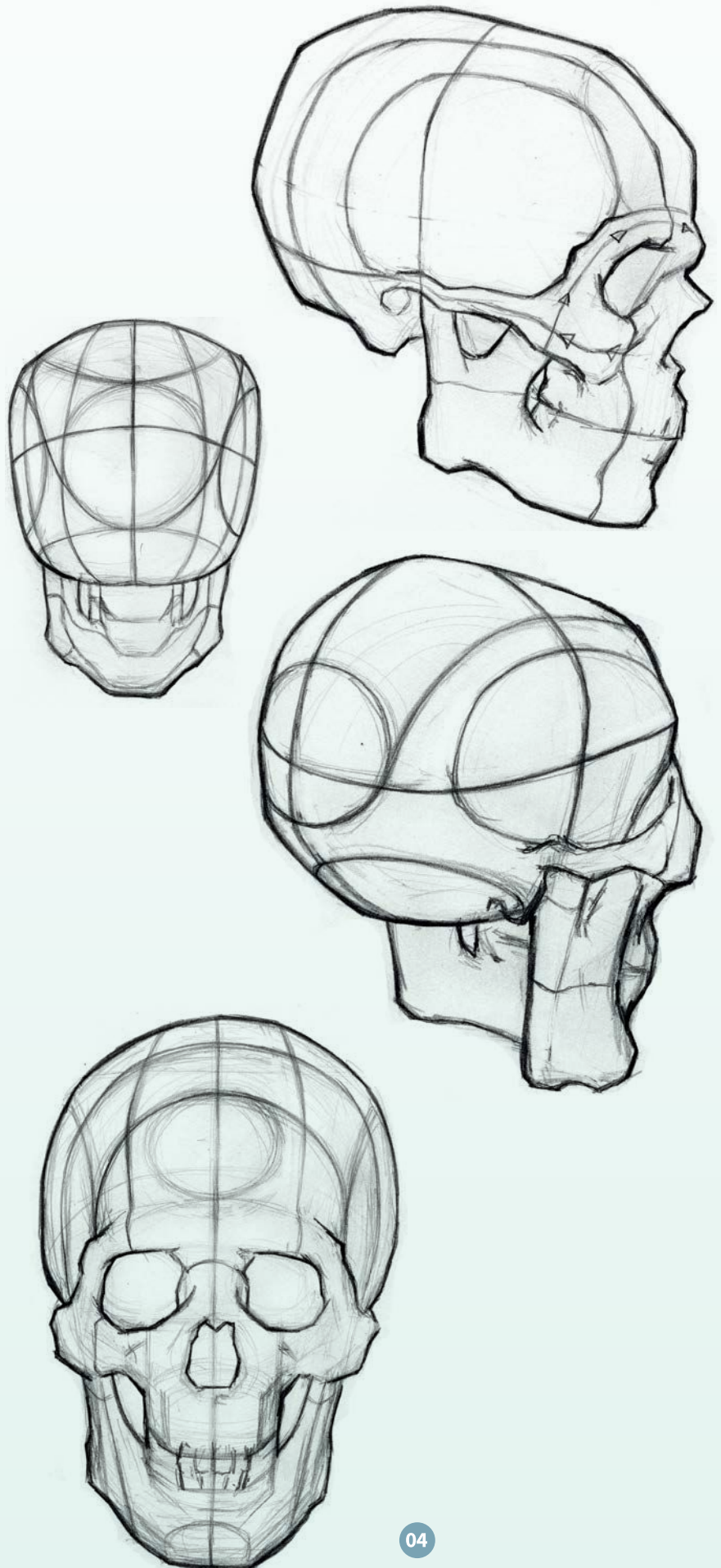
04

Fig.05 shows three head drawings in profile. The first drawing demonstrates the structural rhythm lines of the head. The second drawing demonstrates a finished sketch rendering. The third drawing shows a skull rendering in similar light to the head rendering.

Compare these drawings and see how the cheekbone of the skull affects the cheeks on the face. On the skull, the cheekbone wraps around to the front of the face and moves into shadow. Notice how the cheeks of the face do the same as well.

05
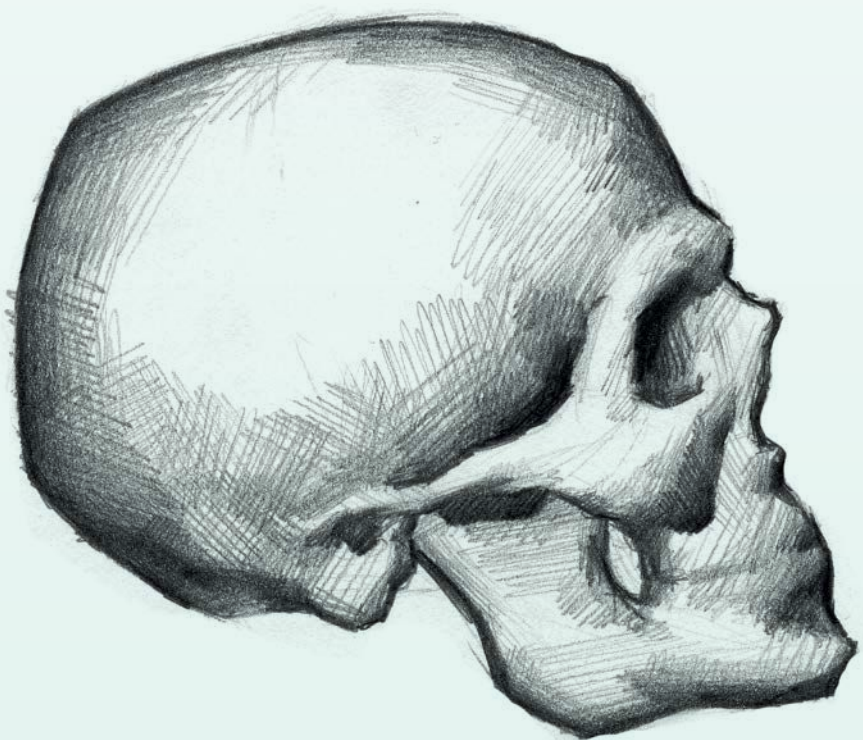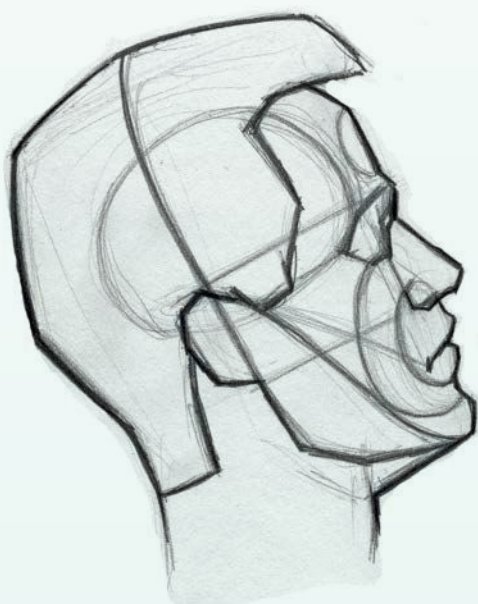
The Mouth

Now let's talk about the features of the face: the mouth, nose, eyes and lips, starting with the mouth.

You may have noticed that the structural head drawings have a circular shape drawing around the mouth (Fig.06). The mouth is a very roundish area, in large part due to the cylindrical pattern of the maxilla and mandible in the skull. To demonstrate this I have drawn a pair of lips on a cylinder and shown how they naturally wrap around the shape. It is important to remember this if your drawn mouth looks flat or unrealistic.

06
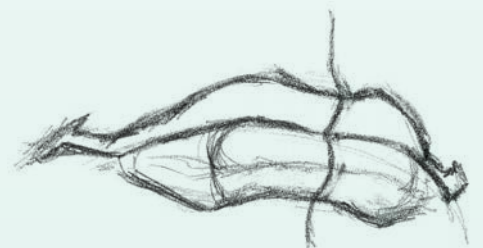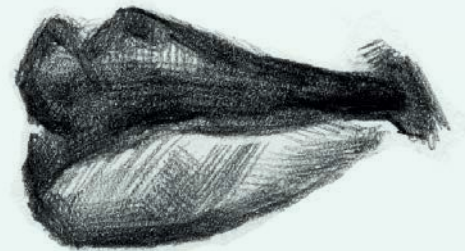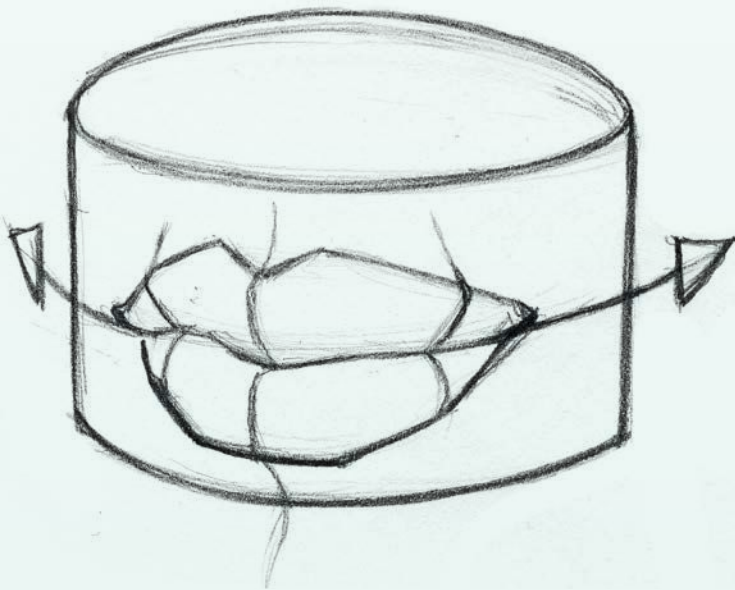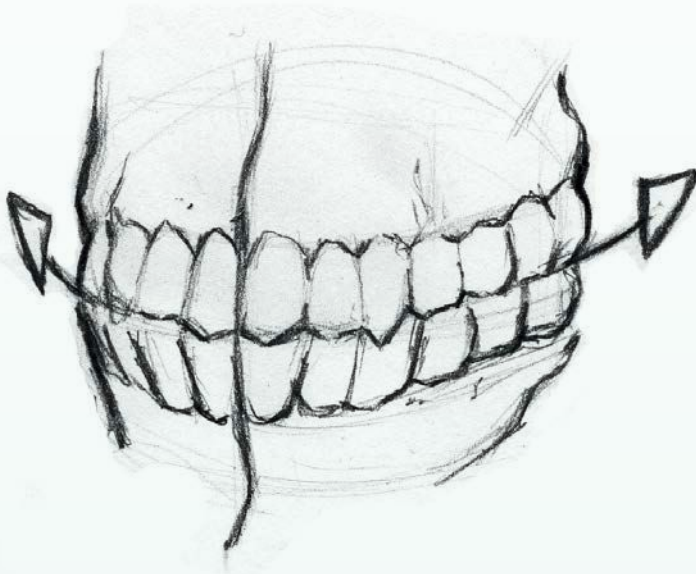
The Nose

Noses can be difficult to draw. In simplified terms, one can imagine the nose as a cylinder or cone shape, with a flattened top.

Fig.07 shows a series of noses from different perspectives. It is important to note the planes of the nose here, particularly the balled bulge at the bottom of the nose and the wings of the nostrils. The wings of the nostrils come out from the front of the nose and wrap around the ball to fold back in and reattach to the face.

The final two drawings in Fig.07 give a clearer view of how the nostrils bulge out around the ball of the nose.
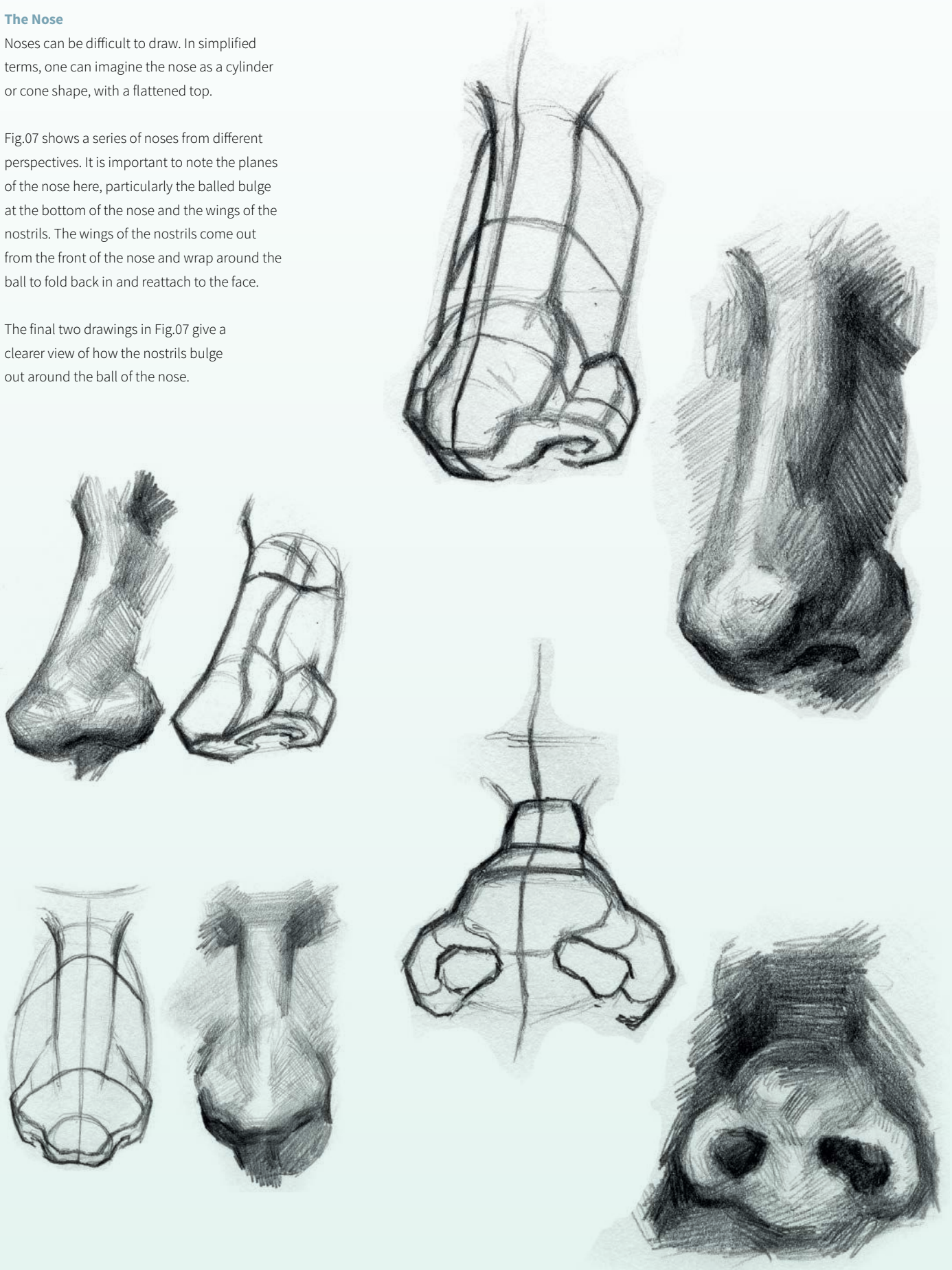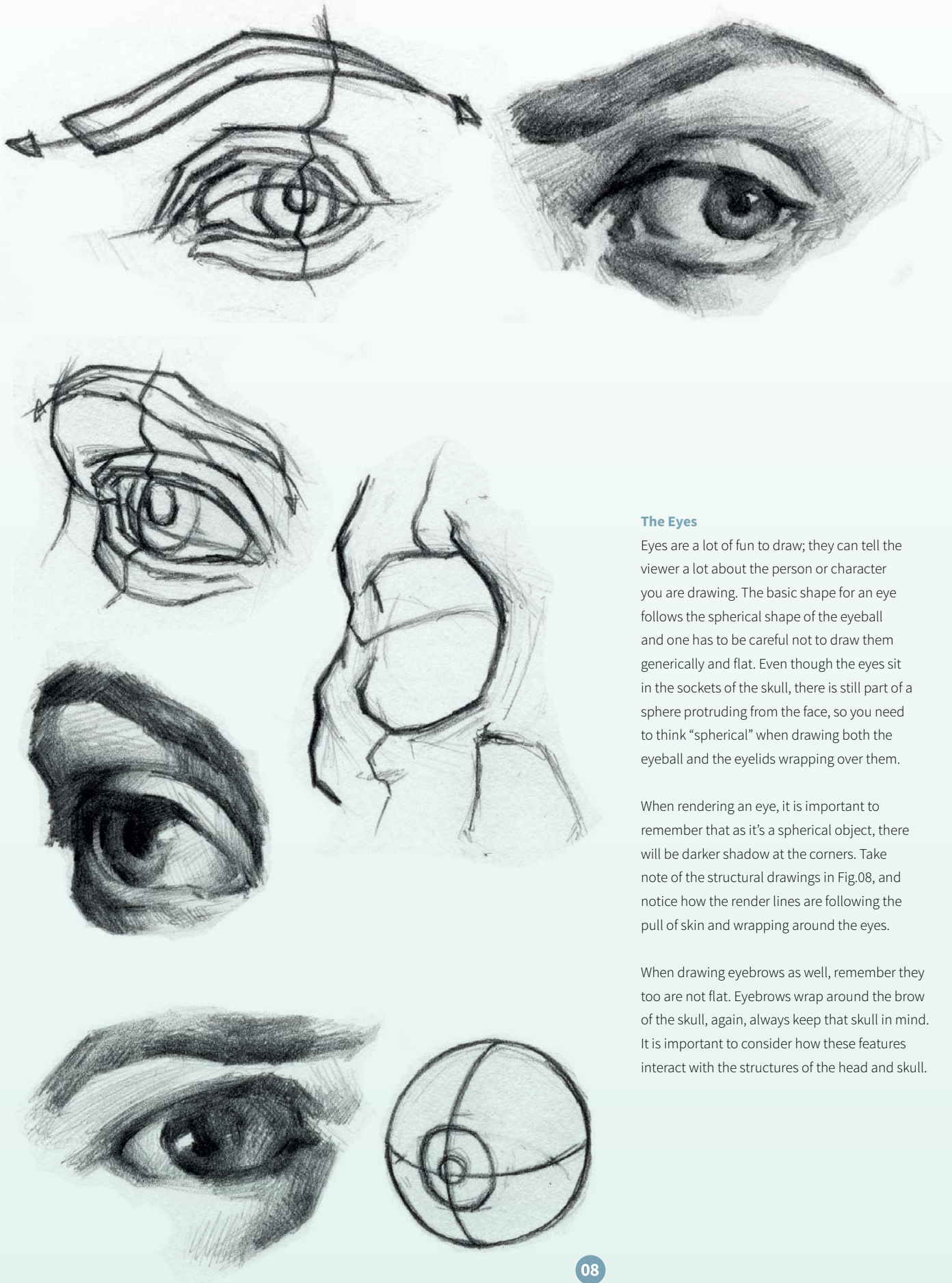
The Eyes

Eyes are a lot of fun to draw; they can tell the viewer a lot about the person or character you are drawing. The basic shape for an eye follows the spherical shape of the eyeball and one has to be careful not to draw them generically and flat. Even though the eyes sit in the sockets of the skull, there is still part of a sphere protruding from the face, so you need to think "spherical" when drawing both the eyeball and the eyelids wrapping over them.

When rendering an eye, it is important to remember that as it's a spherical object, there will be darker shadow at the corners. Take note of the structural drawings in Fig.08, and notice how the render lines are following the pull of skin and wrapping around the eyes.

When drawing eyebrows as well, remember they too are not flat. Eyebrows wrap around the brow of the skull, again, always keep that skull in mind. It is important to consider how these features interact with the structures of the head and skull.

08

The Ears

Ears can be difficult to draw too as they are made up of complicated, intertwining shapes. Look at each shape of the ear in Fig.09 and take note of how the structures interact with each other. See how the earlobe splits into two sections; one section wraps all the way outside the ear and then back in, and the other section curls around to make up the inside of the ear.
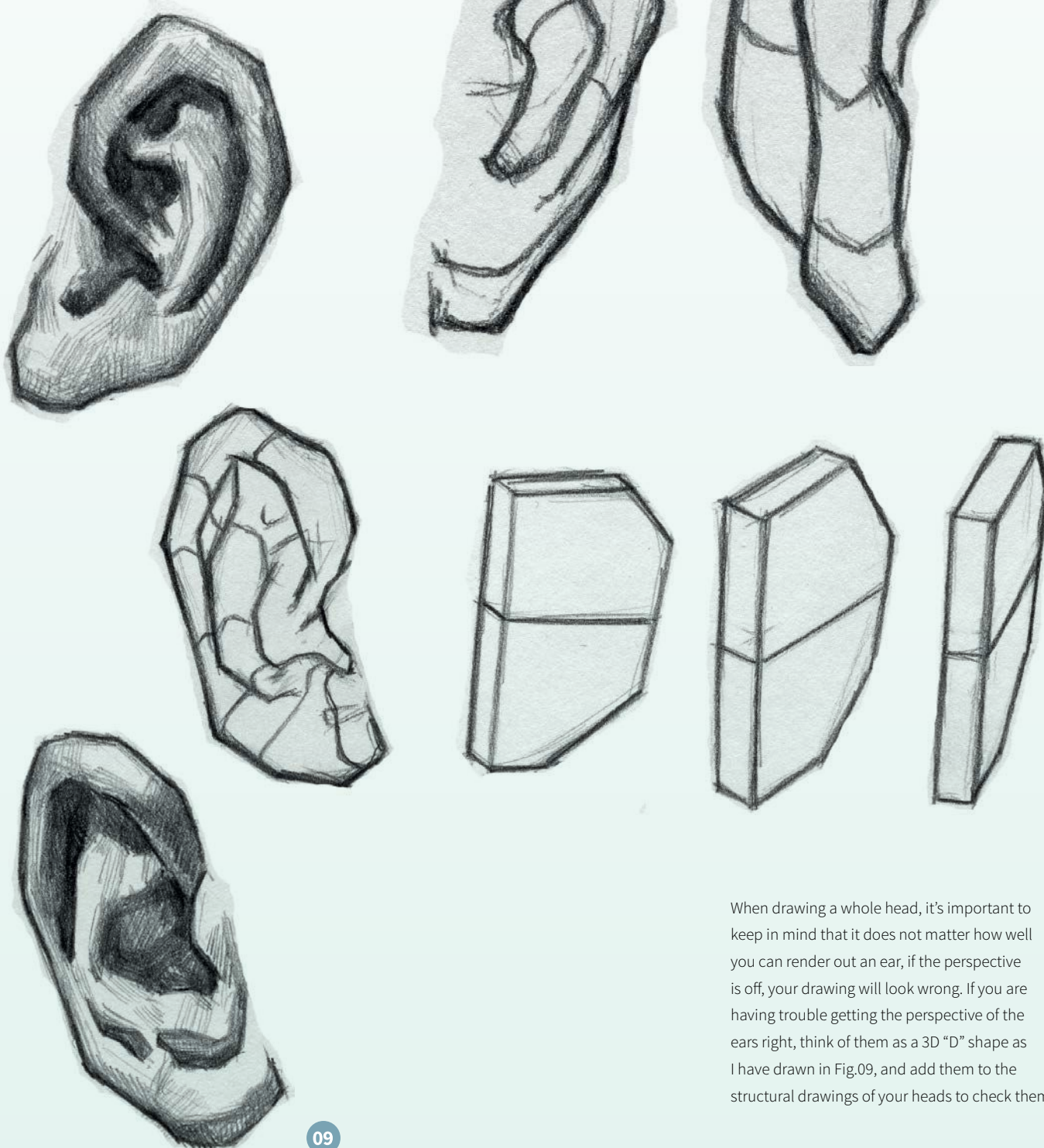
When drawing a whole head, it's important to keep in mind that it does not matter how well you can render out an ear, if the perspective is off, your drawing will look wrong. If you are having trouble getting the perspective of the ears right, think of them as a 3D "D" shape as I have drawn in Fig.09, and add them to the structural drawings of your heads to check them.

09
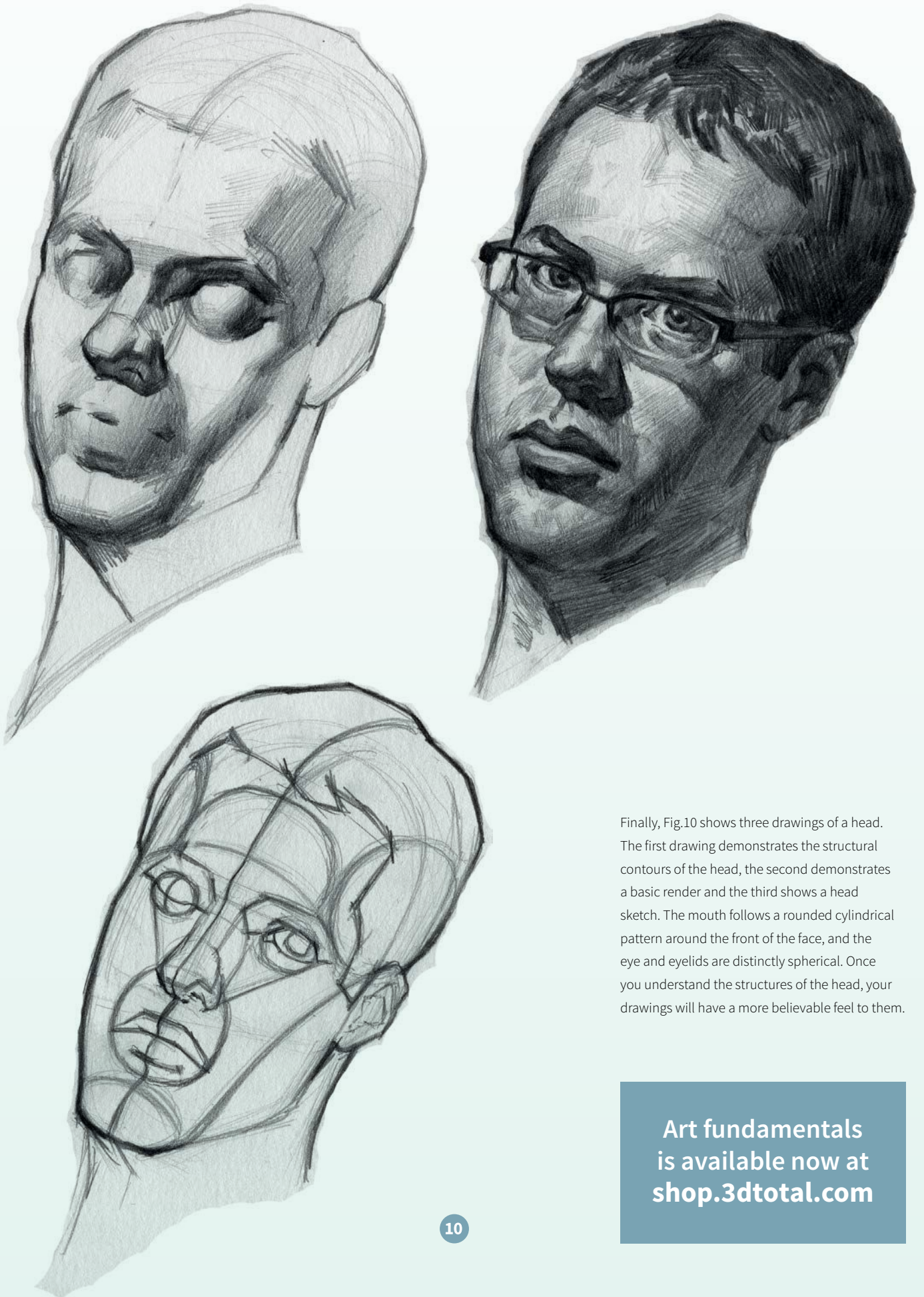
Finally, Fig.10 shows three drawings of a head. The first drawing demonstrates the structural contours of the head, the second demonstrates a basic render and the third shows a head sketch. The mouth follows a rounded cylindrical pattern around the front of the face, and the eye and eyelids are distinctly spherical. Once you understand the structures of the head, your drawings will have a more believable feel to them.

10
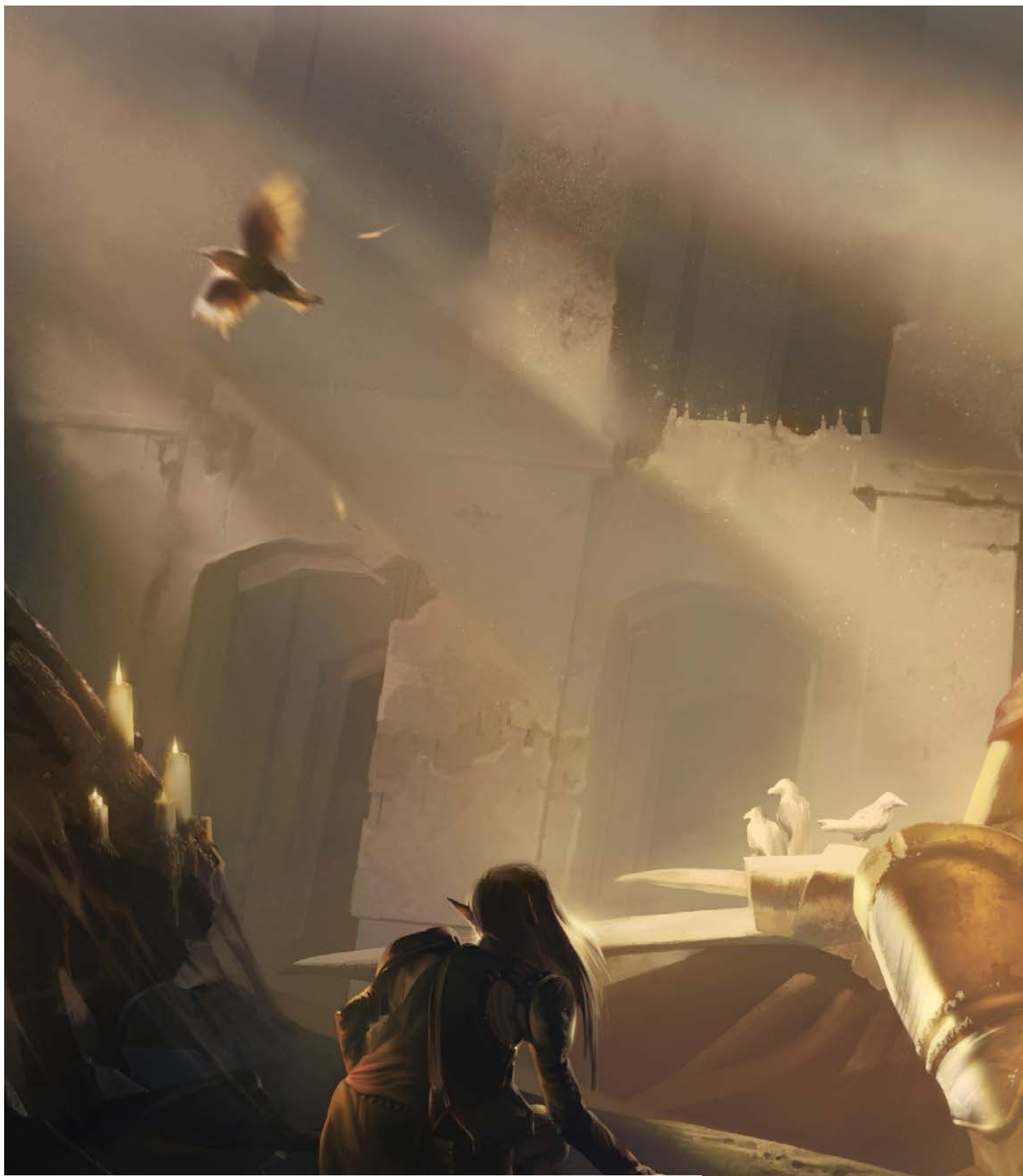
Fantasy fundamentals: FX

Explore the different ways you can add interest and direct focus in your fantasy scenes using visual effects ▶

The Artist

James Wolf Strehle
patreon.com/jameswolf

Software Used:
Photoshop

James is a concept artist and illustrator in the games industry. He works for Volta where he is afforded the opportunity to create art for some of the biggest games in the industry.

Learn how to generate interesting effects in your fantasy scenes...

Part four of this five part series on the fundamental aspects of fantasy painting is all about the effects! Everything you have done up to this point has been geared towards creating a solid base by emphasizing strong composition, perspective, and values. Now we get to polish that work and make it sparkle! Effects take a solid framework and give it the appeal that will catch viewer's eyes. Using such effects as dust particles, blur, and subsurface scattering will not only help with the believability but it can also reinforce the story as well. In the following paragraphs I will show you how!

01 **Coloring a grayscale image:** I usually work in color from the get-go but for this series I have been doing everything in stages. In the last article I focused on values but now it is time to get this piece colored! To color a grayscale image I rely primarily on Color Balance layers and color overlays.

I start by opening up the Color Balance layer and adjusting the shadows, mid-tones, and highlights until I have a decent base color. I then create color

overlays for specific pieces of the environment such as the cloth, bones, and metals. This allows you to color the image like a coloring book, and if you want to change something at a later date you will have it on a separate layer. If you are a minimalist you can have it all on a single layer and use saved selections. In the sample image

you can see how I've laid out my colors into a nice Color Balance layer and color overlay sandwich.

02 **Using color for emotional effect:** When choosing your colors it is important to understand how those colors will affect the viewer. Warm tones tend to elicit

With the use of Color Balance layers and color overlays, coloring the image is a simple matter of filling it in

01

By choosing specific colors you can subtly define the mood of the piece
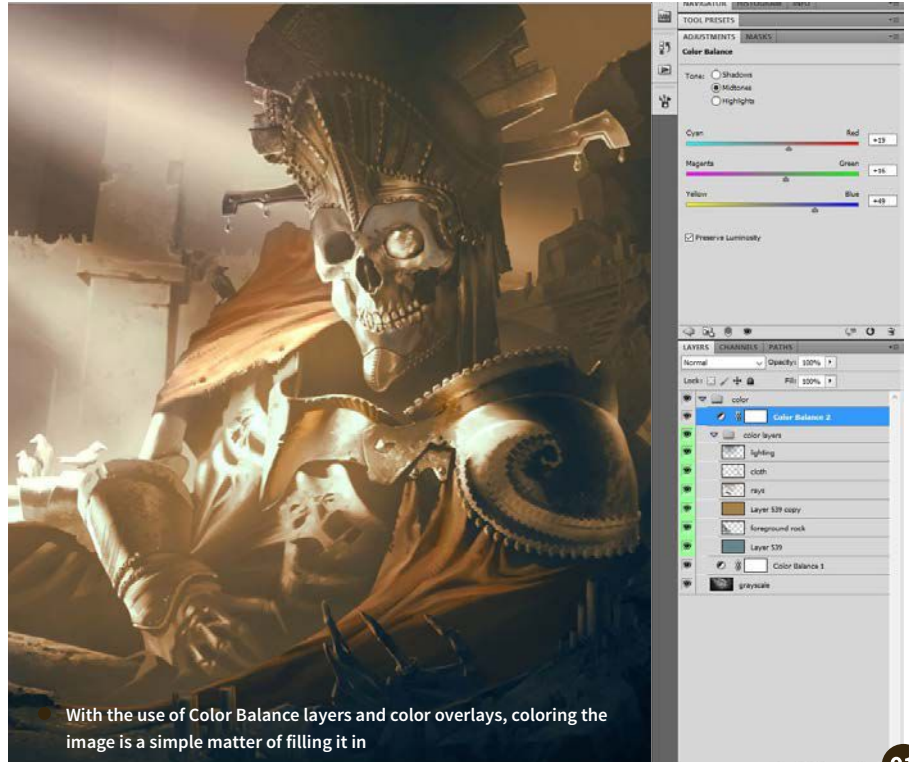
02

excitement and anger whereas cool tones often give the sense of a calm or sad emotional state. The mood I intend to get across with this piece is a feeling of both excitement and anxiety. To achieve this I choose to light the adorned skeleton in a warm orange glow.

When it comes to the skeleton's eye I want it to be appealing but also give the viewer the feeling that risk is involved, so I decide on a red-orange hue. If I choose a blue, for example, it would have a different impact. You can see how the two compare in the image.

03 **Particles and dust:** The use of dust particles is a great effect to compliment your scene, especially in the right context. By adding a few plumes of dust lingering in the air you can really make a space feel uninhabited. You can also add a lot of depth and presence to the atmosphere in the process. These attributes will of course be a perfect fit for a tomb!

To achieve this look and really enhance the scene I place the particles of dust within the rays of light. I stop as the light transitions into shadows. The reason for this is that the dust in the air becomes visible from being illuminated with light. Since there is little light in the shadows there will be less visible dust to illuminate. Being aware of this will help give your scene gain a greater sense of realism. To actually create the dust I use a variety of brushes including a speckled brush, and soft low-opacity brush. Once they are laid down I blend them with a smudge brush.

04 **Candle lighting:** Although it is a bit of a cliché for abandoned dungeons to have mysteriously lit candles, I felt it would be a good opportunity to show you how to create candle effects! Supplemental lighting ▶

⚡ PRO TIPS
Blending color layers

If you want to have more control of how a color layer blends with the layers below it you can do so in the Layer Style menu. Just double-click the layer thumbnail that you want to change and head down to the bottom. Hold Alt and drag the little arrow so it splits. This will let you adjust how your selected layer is blended with the layer underneath. This is especially helpful when applying colors specifically to the highlights or shadows on an image.

Dust is added into light to give the scene a neglected and uninhabited presence

03

Candles are added using a glowing brush and fading the background behind it, creating an illuminated, highlight effect
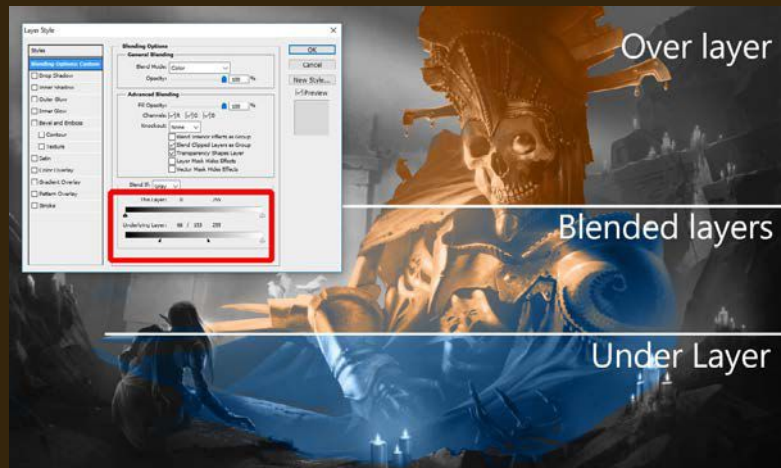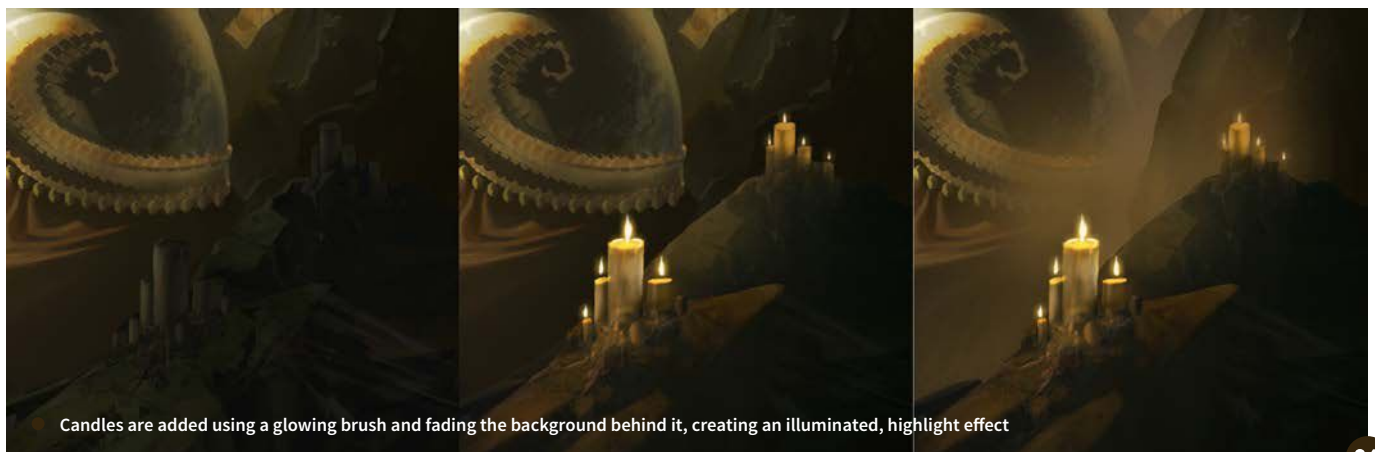
04
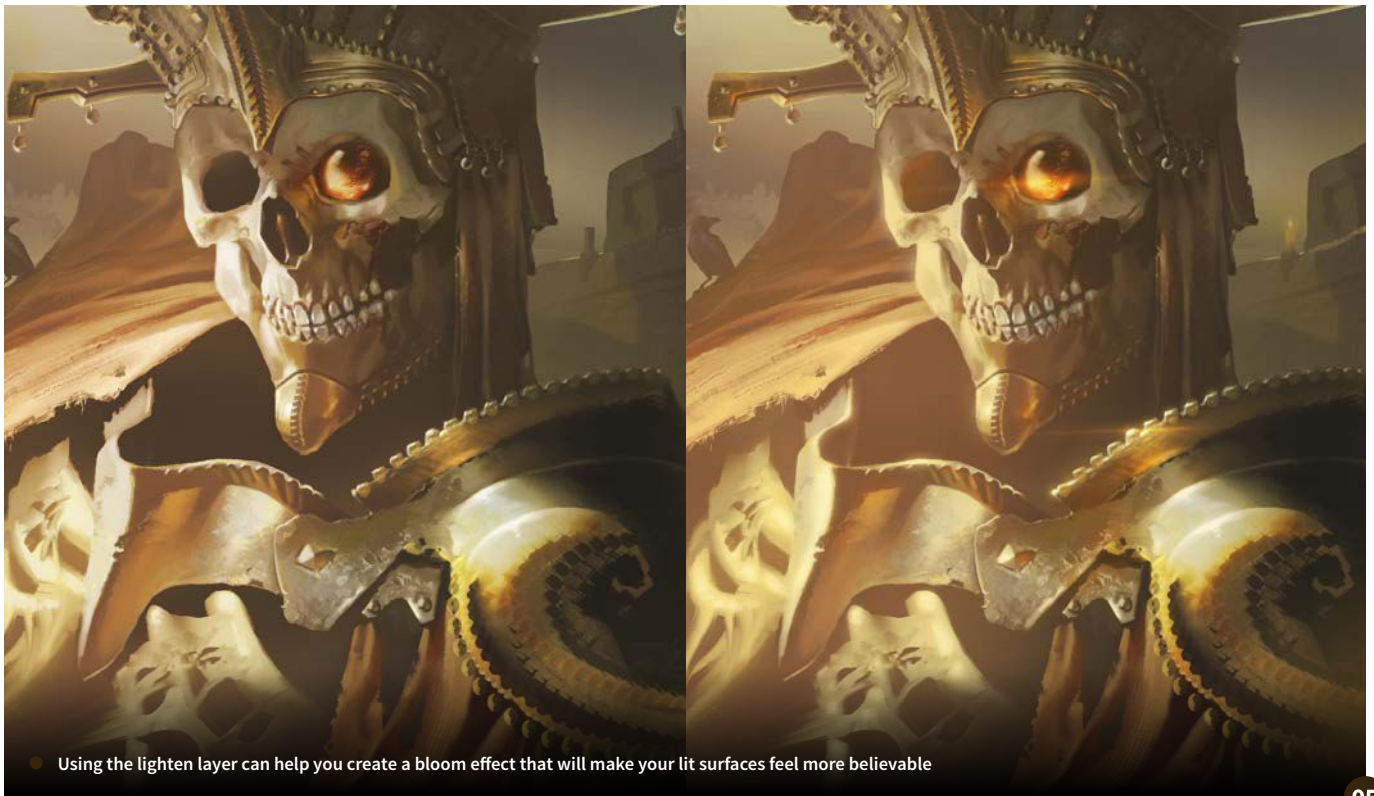
Using the lighten layer can help you create a bloom effect that will make your lit surfaces feel more believable

05

⚡ PRO TIPS
Creating effects brushes

By combining various brush properties with FX layers you can get some pretty interesting effect brushes. Sometimes I make a custom brush for an effect that would otherwise take forever to paint in manually. In the image shot I have created a brush that simulates a small pile of gold nuggets. Now I can paint normally and everything I paint with the brush will have this golden effect.

Just note that the FX portion will only apply to the current layer that it is applied to. If you make a new layer they will not carry over and you will need to reapply the FX.
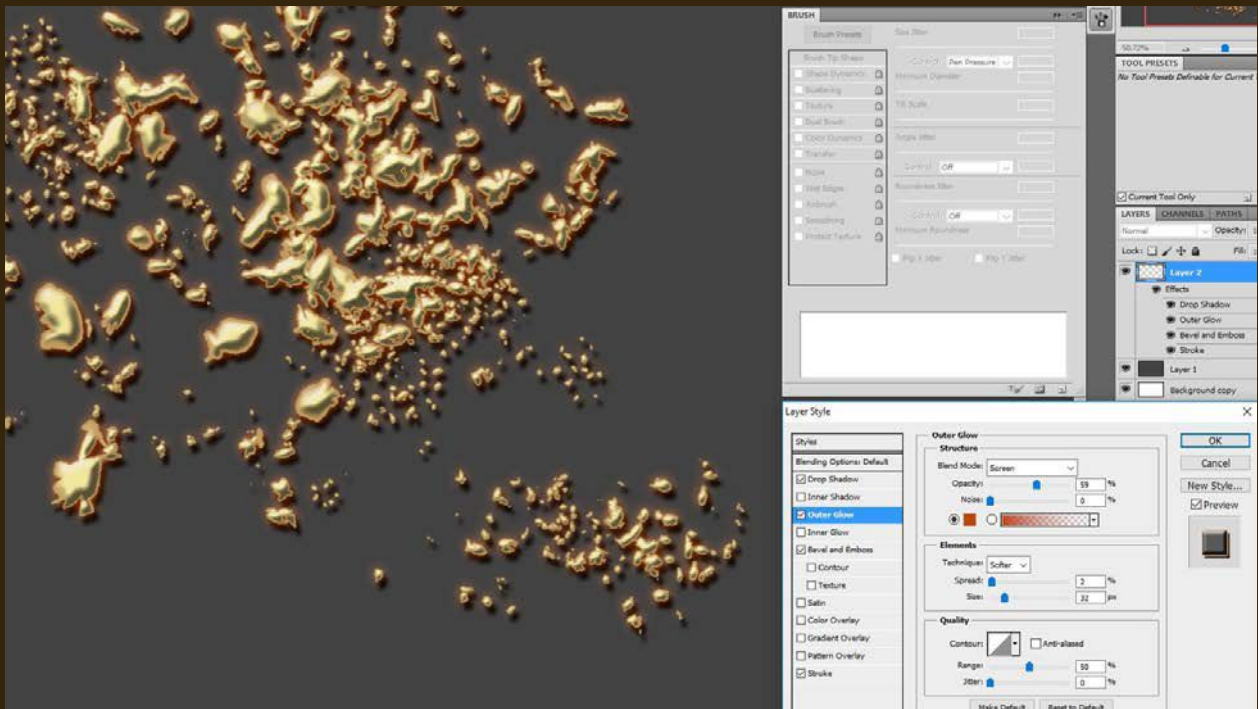
can be very helpful when you want to add a little attention to a forgotten element of your painting. In my case I want to highlight the thief, and candles are a great way of doing this.

The main element of a candle is the flame. Not only will it light up the objects around it but it will also illuminate the air surrounding it just like the dust did in the last step. After the basic candle shape is roughed-in I start painting the flame with a brush attached to a glow effect as seen in the sample image. Once the candle is done the final step is to fade out the scene behind the flame in a separate under-layer using a low opacity brush. The light around the flame will bleach out the background because particles around it will cover everything behind it with its radiance.

05 **The bloom effect:** The bloom effect emphasizes the brightness of a surface. Whether it is a shiny piece of armor or a bleached-white skull, adding in a little bloom effect can really make a surface feel radiant. To do so I use a Lighten layer with a mid-tone hue to increase the lighting around the surface without affecting the subtle rendering that is already in place. The more particles in the air, the more expanded the effect will be.

If the lighten layer is too light or saturated then you can open up the Hue/Saturation adjustment layer to make tweaks. You do not want to over-do this effect because it can potentially wreak havoc on your previously laid-out values. It also has the drawback of eliminating details if you are not careful. It is a pretty simple effect to implement but it can really help make your lighting more believable. In the image you can see the process I use to apply the effect.

06 **Using blur:** The blur effect has the versatility to be used in a variety of ways.
It can give motion to an object, it can add drama to a scene, or it can be used to take attention off of a subject. This makes it a pretty useful effect but it can be tricky to implement depending on the method. There are two options when it comes to applying the effect. You can either have Photoshop do the heavy lifting, or you can paint it in manually; both have benefits and drawbacks. It is extremely easy to have Photoshop do the blur for you but the result looks very digital. This may be fine if you are working in a realistic manner but it can be jarring for stylized pieces. Painting it in manually is a bit more challenging but results in a natural, painterly look. In the image you can see how much different ways of blurring can change an image.

07 **Thieving elf details:** There are a few details that need to be worked out with the elf. These include rim lights, and hair effects. Now that there are candles in the ▶

Whether you want to add motion to your piece or tone down a distracting element, blur is a malleable effect

06
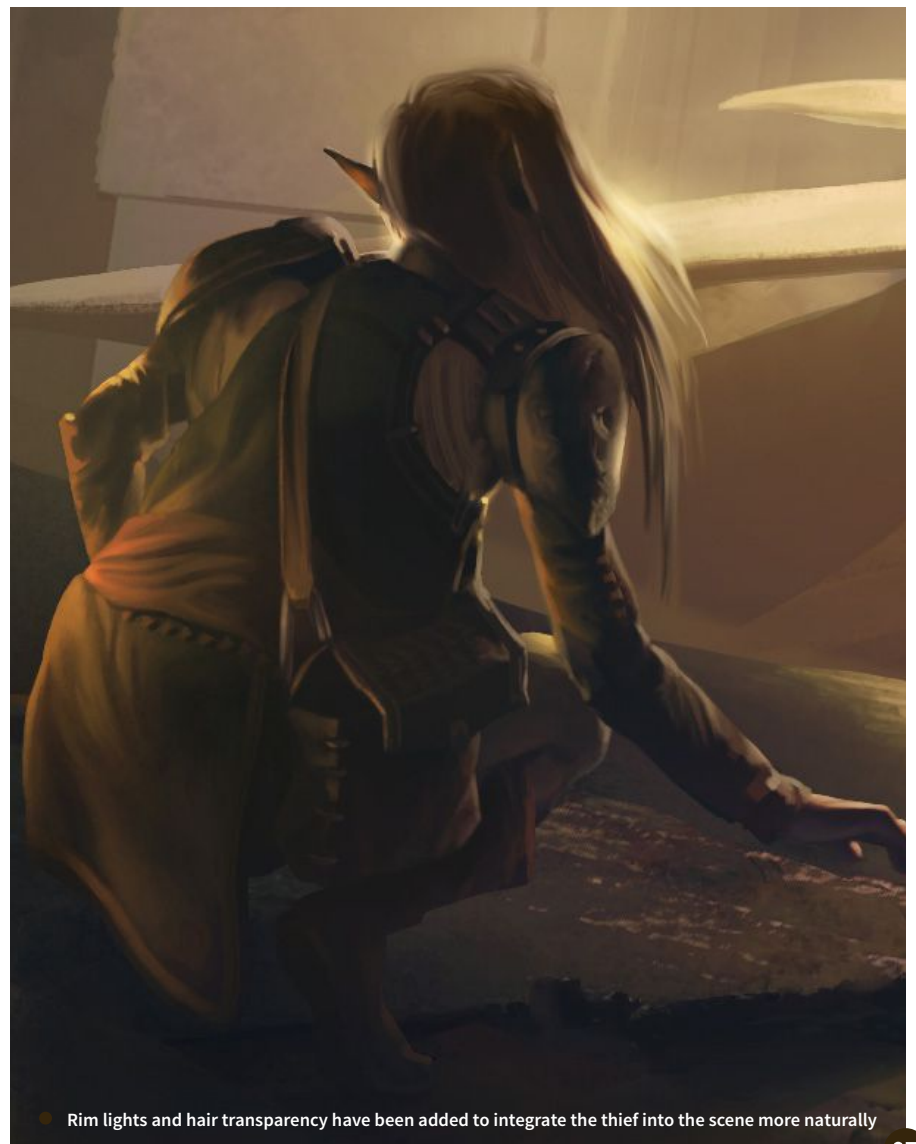
Rim lights and hair transparency have been added to integrate the thief into the scene more naturally

07

⚡ PRO TIPS
Knowing when to stop

Filling your image with effects can be a lot of fun but remember that they are there to enhance the story you are trying to tell, not hinder it. Knowing when to stop is an important skill to have. You need to perpetually ask yourself "Does this make my piece better, and is my intent still clear?" There have been many times where I've created an awesome effect but ultimately trashed it because it was too distracting.

In the image, I've simulated a garish effect to show how it can ruin a scene. The sparkles were fun to add but the focus is no longer on the skeleton's coveted ruby eye, you instead wonder "Why is everything so shiny?"

● **Subsurface scattering brings skin to life as it helps the viewer to better understand the material and its interaction with light**

scene, they need to be reflected on the thief's body using rim lighting. Doing so is a straight-forward process but you will want to make sure the value is appropriate for the source of light.

A common mistake for beginners is that they will use a single bright color for the entire rim light. You need to keep in mind how the light will affect each surface. The clothing, for example, is not going to reflect light in the same way that metal will. Next there needs to be elements to the hair that allows light from the background to show through. I do not want to light the hair too drastically because it is not being hit directly by light. I just want enough to convince viewers that it is thin and wispy.

08 **Subsurface scattering:** Another effect that can help generate a sense of realism is subsurface scattering. This is when light penetrates the surface of an object, scattering and illuminating it from within. A classic example of this would be the ears or hands when held up against a harsh light. In my case I will be using this effect on the thief's elf ears, as well as the skeleton's cape and the bird's feathers.

To do this I simply paint in the penetrating light as normal, the trick is choosing the right colors. Making it too bright will result in the object looking as if it is emanating its own light source. A dark, warm color is enough to make the effect work for the ears. In the case of the cape, it is far thinner and is being hit by a much stronger light. As a result the chosen color is brighter. The same is true for the bird's feathers.

09 **Creating a hammered effect:** Occasionally there are times when the Liquify filter comes in handy. A hammered metal effect is one of those times! By using the Mirror tool under the Liquify filter you can come up with some pretty decent looking concave textures. To do this, select the Mirror tool and alter the metal by making small circular gestures with your brush. The more contrast within your brush's preview cursor, the deeper the divot will appear to be.

I repeat this many times over until I have the textural look that I am going for. This is not the only thing Liquify is good for though. I use it for many applications such as water effects, altering shapes, and even as a rendering tool. Do not be afraid to play around with this filter as there are many settings and tools to play with!

> **"I will often take a break at this stage and come back at a later date to see if there are any other effects that could strengthen the piece as a whole"**

10 **The role of effects:** Effects are the icing on the cake. They take a solid base and give it the flair needed to make you believe in the fantasy. If something is not quite hitting the mark, an effect can help bring it along. It is important though to step back and make sure your effects are properly fitting into their role.

I will often take a break at this stage and come back at a later date to see if there are any other effects that could strengthen the piece as a whole. Occasionally when I take a fresh look I realize that I have over-done something.

In the case of this painting I notice that the candles are taking too much attention away from the main subject and need to be toned down. After playing around a bit with the effects I am finally happy with the scene. They enhance the piece enough to sell it without stealing the show. With this I can consider the effects complete! In the next, final article I will go over everything we've discussed in this five part series and show you the very last tweaks I'll be making to the image before giving it my stamp of approval. See you then! ●

> **Part five to be announced as a free download on 2dartistmag.com**
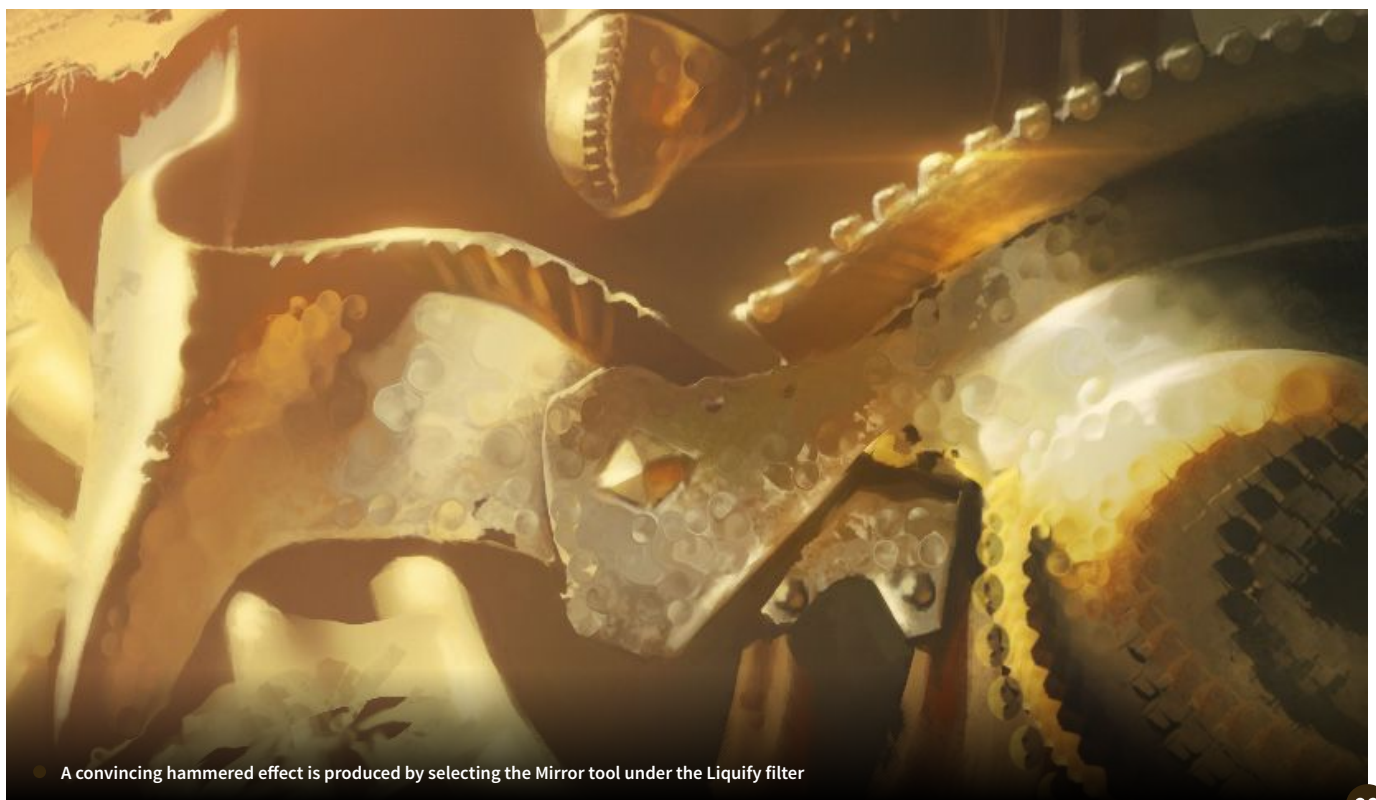
● A convincing hammered effect is produced by selecting the Mirror tool under the Liquify filter

09

Speed paint a dramatic fantasy scene

Alex Olmedo shows how to quickly turn a photograph into a painterly action concept ▶

All images © Alex Olmedo

The Artist

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Software Used:
Photoshop

Alex Olmedo is a Spanish
concept designer and
illustrator who is very
passionate about natural
landscapes. He first
discovered digital painting
three years ago and hasn't
looked back since.

FREE
CHAPTER

3DTOTALPUBLISHING

MASTER THE
ART OF
speed Painting
:DIGITAL PAINTING TECHNIQUES

This tutorial will show you how to create a speed painting with a painterly traditional feel. Speed paintings are a great way to help improve your skill level because they force your imagination and also show you which techniques are best to use to realize your ideas quickly.

The techniques you will use will help you take any photograph and turn it into a fantasy painting. This will be done by utilizing the colors and textures from the reference photo. You will start off loose, gently and slowly bringing the forms to life in order to give your painting the atmosphere and narrative you want.

01 **Reference images:** It is so easy to find references. You can take your own or you can do a quick online search or use image collection sites such as Tumblr and Pinterest to build up a reference library. You can also buy (quite cheaply) big packs of reference images on websites such as www.photobash.org.

I look through my collection of images and choose the one shown in image 01 for its interesting colors and atmosphere – it is taken from Ben Mauro's Matte Painting reference pack, available from his Gumroad page.

02 **Transform the photo:** The first thing to do is resize and move the reference

Image printed courtesy of Ben Mauro
(https://gumroad.com/benmaurodesign)

This is the original photo that caught my attention for the colors and diagonal composition

01

Transform the image paying attention to the composition and the quality of the textures that you will probably use later

02

Use the Mixer brush impulsively and with energy to create realistic brushstrokes imitating traditional media

03

Sometimes the shapes just appear as you are painting

04

image on the canvas using the Transform tool (Ctrl+T) to find a good composition. Try not to distort it too much as you don't want it to become blurry or unfocused.

Following the basic rules of atmospheric perspective, you want the background to be brightest, the middle ground to be warm, and the foreground to be dark.

03 **Add the first strokes:** Use the Color Picker to select the color of the smoke and on a new layer put down some big brushstrokes with your favorite brush. You don't need to be too concerned with defining

a particular shape, just be impulsive and painterly. You can play with the same brush in Mixer Brush mode to soften the edges and add more color mixing – this mode is great for a more traditional look for your work.

04 **Happy accidents:** A really great way of finding new shapes is through "happy accidents"; this can happen when you are playing around with the brushstrokes (or adding photo textures) and you see something interesting, such as a person or a creature. The first of the darker smokey strokes revealed a creature's head, so I continue to work on it until a dragon shape appears.

05 **The pose of the dragon:** So you have your dragon head and the rest of the body is starting to appear, what next? You should think about what the dragon is doing, is he walking or attacking? I go for attacking! Paint the wings spread out in a menacing pose – they will lose their definition in the background. Work with the Brush and Smudge tools to give a mysterious atmospheric feeling.

06 **Emphasize the mood:** The mood of the painting is given through the colors, lighting, and shapes. As this photo is overcast we have more room to play with the variables. Losing the shape of the dragon with ▶

● **The definitive pose of the dragon after making some failed attempts. This one leaves more room for the imagination**

05

● **Using the Smudge tool you can soften edges to integrate them into the background, giving a greater sense of atmosphere**

06

the background makes it appear darker and more mystical, leaving it up to the viewer's imagination to complete the story behind the image. This means we can draw the viewer further into the image and increase their interest.

You can always try flipping the image as an option if the composition doesn't feel right; it is amazing what a difference this can make.

07 **Focal point:** Using the most basic tenets of composition, the rule of thirds, paint the dragon head on one of the focal points; you need to add more detail to areas where you want the viewer's eye to rest.

Using both the Standard and Mixer brushes, add details to the dragon head, such as scales, horns, and the suggestion of eyes and a mouth. Even though this is a focal point you don't want it to be too defined to maintain the painterly look.

08 **Define the body:** Now that we are sure about the position and the intention of the dragon, it is time to place him in the environment. It is not always good to constantly look at references, but instead be more spontaneous and original. I decide to go with the classic "ready to attack" pose of felines which is something most people can easily recognize. I also keep working on the rest of the body, redefining some forms and paying close attention to the strokes to achieve more bulky forms.

> "Flipping the canvas is one of the best techniques for avoiding mistakes in the composition and balance of your paintings"

09 **Flip the canvas:** Flipping the canvas is one of the best techniques for avoiding mistakes in the composition and balance of your paintings. When you are looking at the same picture for long periods of time your brain starts to get used to it and it will fail to see any errors in the composition or proportions. I highly recommend you set up a shortcut for rotating your image; it will save time and also improve the results of your work.

10 **Color palette:** Use a neutral and desaturated color palette; you can get the dragon's colors from the environment and with slight changes to the values and

Placing the main subject close to one of the four focal points helps the viewer to quickly look at it

07

The dragon is almost done

08

Choose an easy shortcut to remember so you can quickly refresh your perspective of the painting

09

Neutral and desaturated colors give the painting more serenity and harmony
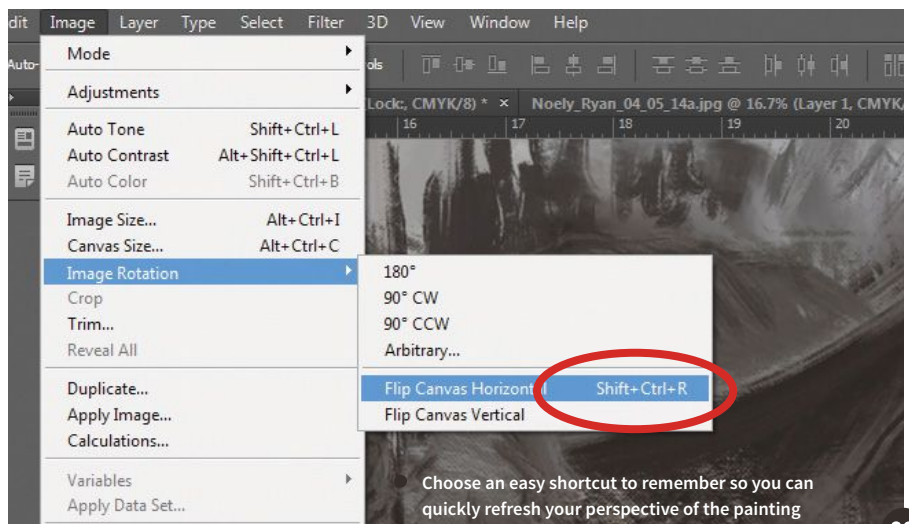
10

hues make a harmonious painting. It is also important to consider the reflective light – adding some oranges and browns to the bottom of the body and the brighter grays of the sky to the highlights will give your main subject the color vibrancy necessary to make it more interesting to the viewer.

11 **Secondary main subject:** If you are happy with the background, you can now focus on a secondary subject. As there is an hour time limit you will need to simplify your options. You could go with a dragon hunter – maybe riding a horse or standing in the field, getting ready to attack the big dragon. When adding a character try starting with the basic shape of the silhouette, using a hard brush. This will make it easier to see the proportions and pose.

12 **Describe the secondary subject:** When you are happy with the silhouette you can play around with the Free Transform tool to distort and stretch the figure to fit into the scene. To add more detail lock the transparent pixels and start adding some colors, again using the colors from the surrounding area. Suggest some of the forms with only light and shadow. To make the shape crisper use a hard eraser to give a nice clean edge.

13 **Costume design:** Taking advantage of the colors added in the previous step, start playing with more hues and values, ▶

A silhouette helps you to get the right post for your character

11
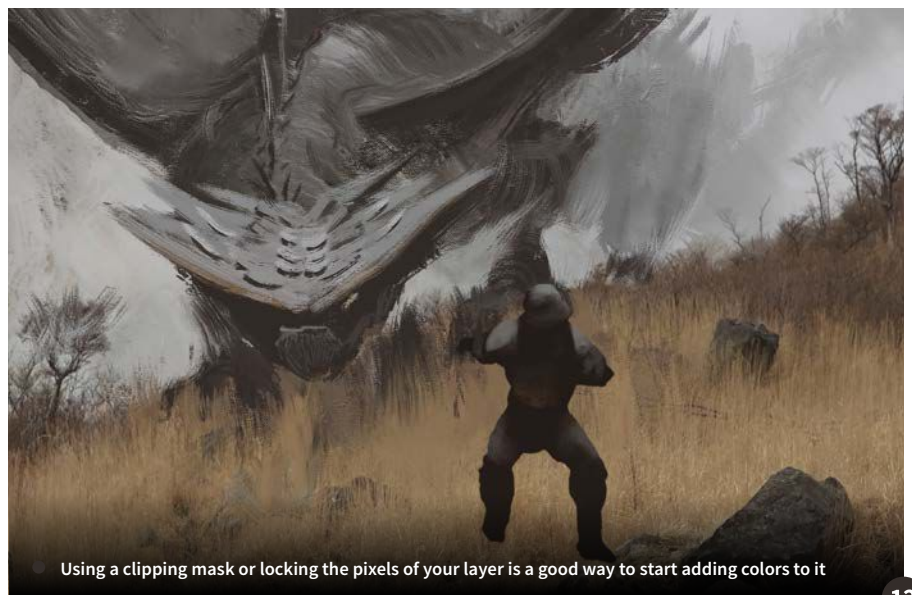
Using a clipping mask or locking the pixels of your layer is a good way to start adding colors to it

12

Try to break the silhouette by adding things that seem to hang and lean on the body, making it more believable

13

adding more volume and details. As a dragon hunter, he needs to have some kind of armor and a helmet. Using the same brush as the rest of the painting along with some scattered texture brushes, you can start defining the different parts of the armor and clothes. This is a good opportunity to introduce a new hue – the green tones of the dress coat make for an eye-catching outfit for the hunter.

14 **Correct the composition:** If you are not happy with the placement of your character you can easily correct the composition by stretching and moving him until he is in a better place. In a new position in image 14, he is bigger and closer to the viewer. He is in the opposite focal point to the main subject, the dragon, giving the painting a better balance and flow, following the diagonal composition I liked in the original photo.

15 **Refining phase:** Now that the painting is almost complete you can start adding the last little details. Zoom in closer, although not too much, to the parts that you think need more detail.

You don't want to waste time messing with non-vital elements and unnecessary details.

Keep up with the spontaneous style from the beginning right through to the end, but still think carefully about when and where you are going to put the brushstrokes.

16 **Separate the main subjects:** Near to the end of the process is the time to add some final touches balancing the whole image. Duplicate the dragon hunter layer and go to Image > Adjustments > Brightness/Contrast…, and play with the sliders to get the values you want. This will give the appearance that the two focal points are farther apart – atmospheric perspective at play again.

The final placement of the secondary character

14

Using textured brushes I suggest more details on the character, through the patterns on the coat for example

15

With more contrast the foreground elements look closer to the camera/viewer

16

17 **Add more drama:** You need to add balance to the image after darkening the dragon hunter to add more drama. One of the easiest ways is to duplicate the whole image (Ctrl+Alt+Shift+E), adjust the Curves (Ctrl+M or Image > Adjustments > Curves…), and make it much darker. Then create a layer mask painted black where you want the image to be brighter. This way you can better control the light without painting over everything again. I decide to add light to the dragon's head and between the two subjects, adding a darker frame to the picture.

18 **Warm light:** Adding warm colors to the lighter areas of an image can emphasize the lighting to contrast with the cool shadows – a Color Dodge layer is perfect for this. Fill it with black, choose the light color you want, and paint slowly and carefully in the places where you want the contrast to pop. Again, add the most contrast near the dragon head. In fact the warm light behind his arms makes me think of a background on fire or something more sinister, helping with the storytelling.

> **"Doing this will unify the colors and edges of the painting, making it more attractive to the viewer"**

19 **Unify the scene:** The last step I usually do with some of my paintings is to add an Overlay layer with a lot of noise on top of everything. Create a new layer filled with gray set to 50% and turn it into an Overlay layer, then go to Filter > Filter Gallery… > Grain and add lots of Grain. Finally, change the opacity of the layer to 20–25%. Doing this will unify the colors and edges of the painting, making it more attractive to the viewer.

20 **Final touches:** In the last two steps I change the values of some parts of the body of the dragon. I try to tone it down with some atmosphere, adding some light rays coming from the top of the image.

I also use some of my custom brushes to add more detail to the atmosphere as dots and particles. This makes the painting more dynamic and realistic. Just add a little highlight on the armor and finish. ●

With the intention of making the dragon more sinister and striking, I darken the image

17

I add warms colors in the lights to make a richer and more colorful image that previously was a bit monochromatic

18

Add noisy or textured Overlay layers on top your image to unify and add depth to your paintings
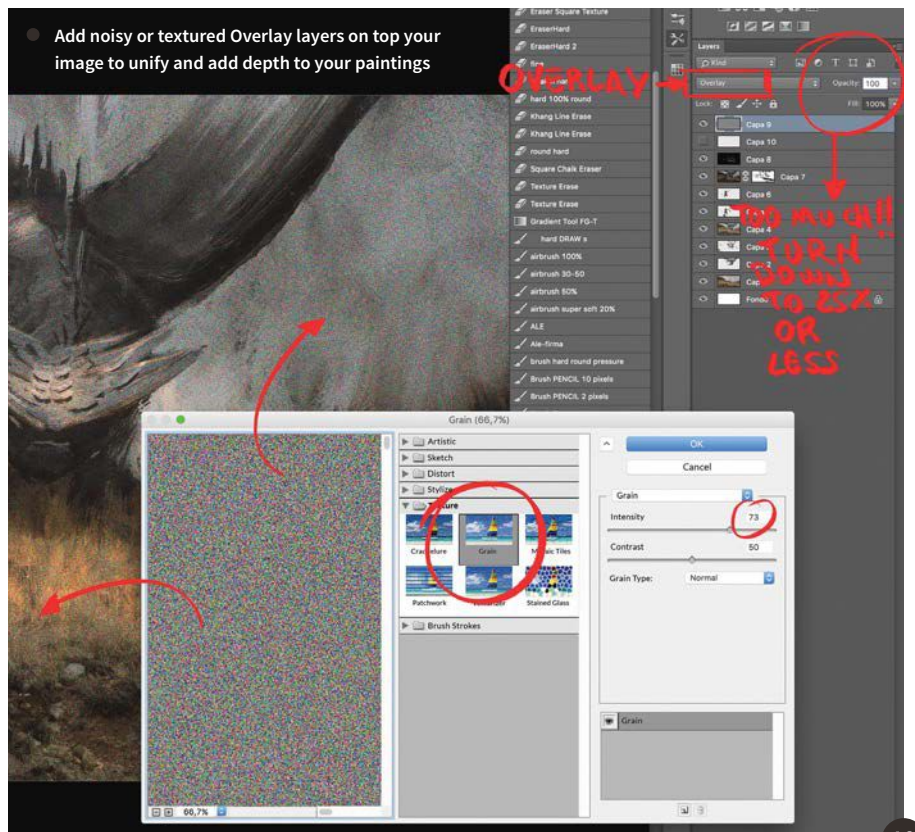
19

The Artist

Alex Olmedo
artstation.com/artist/
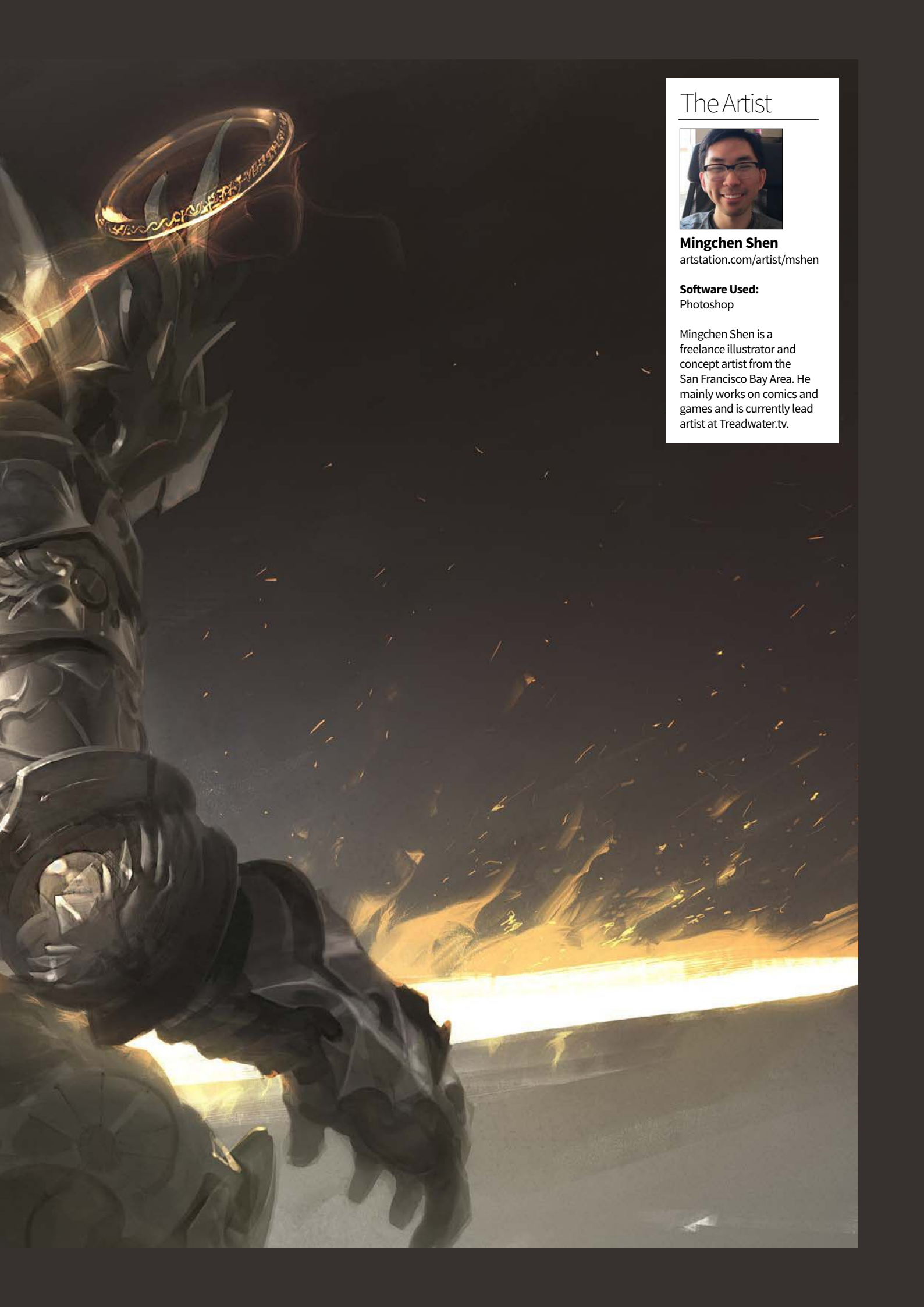alex_olmedo

Creating luminous light effects

See how Mingchen Shen used different Photoshop brushes and modes to create his graphic novel illustration *Seraph* ▶

All images © Mingchen Shen

The Artist

Mingchen Shen
artstation.com/artist/mshen

Software Used:
Photoshop

Mingchen Shen is a freelance illustrator and concept artist from the San Francisco Bay Area. He mainly works on comics and games and is currently lead artist at Treadwater.tv.

Get tips on using different layer and brush modes to create light effects...

This project demonstrates one of the processes I used to illustrate comic pages while working on the Treadwater graphic novel. I shall go over my workflow starting with the rough sketch, how that sketch developed into finished values, and finally showing how I used Photoshop's blending modes to bring the black and white image into color. I found this process to be the most efficient for producing illustrations quickly because it dealt with values and hues separately. Using blending modes to color allowed me to quickly experiment with different color schemes and make adjustments.

I'll also show you how I used the layer styles and blending modes to create the glowing visual effects of this painting. This approach works best with darker moods and materials

like cloth and armor. For lighter values and organic things like human skin and vegetation this process also works as an initial color pass, but will require additional rendering to capture subtle hue shifts, reflective lighting, and subsurface scattering.

Starting the underlying values in a color, instead of black and white, would also help with organic materials and save rendering time. In this painting however I opted to start with a grayscale value layer since I wanted to keep the shadows fairly muted in order to emphasize the glow of the seraph's back rings and flaming sword.
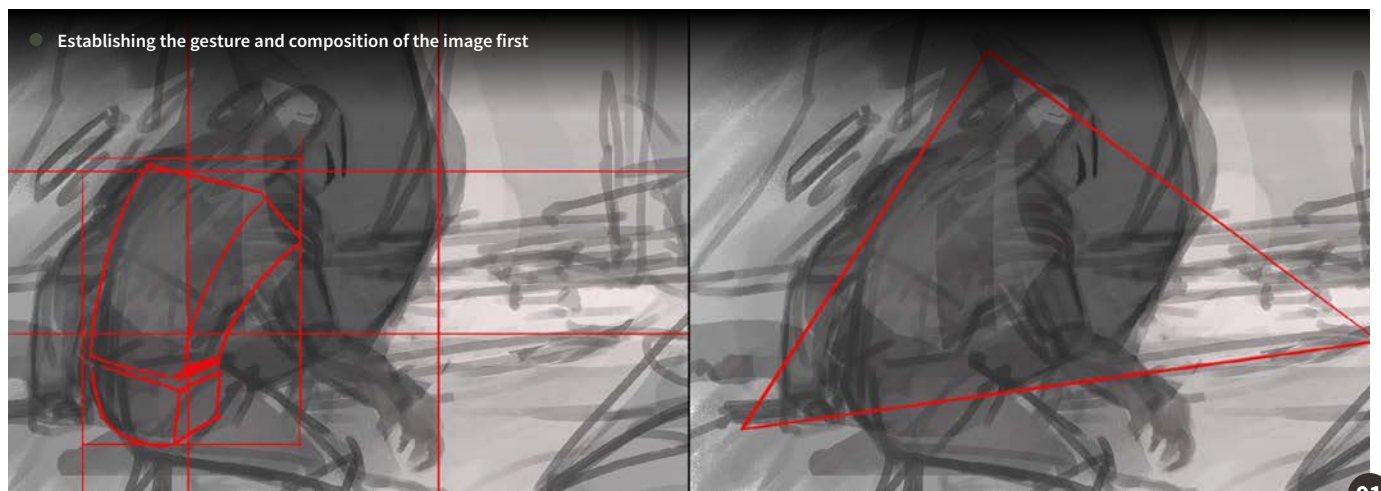
01 **Gesture and composition:** When sketching I used bigger brushes and broad strokes with around 80-90% opacity to quickly capture the gesture of the piece. This allowed me to focus on the overall composition and helped avoid getting stuck on details. This step was usually pretty messy, but it helped to develop a solid composition within the

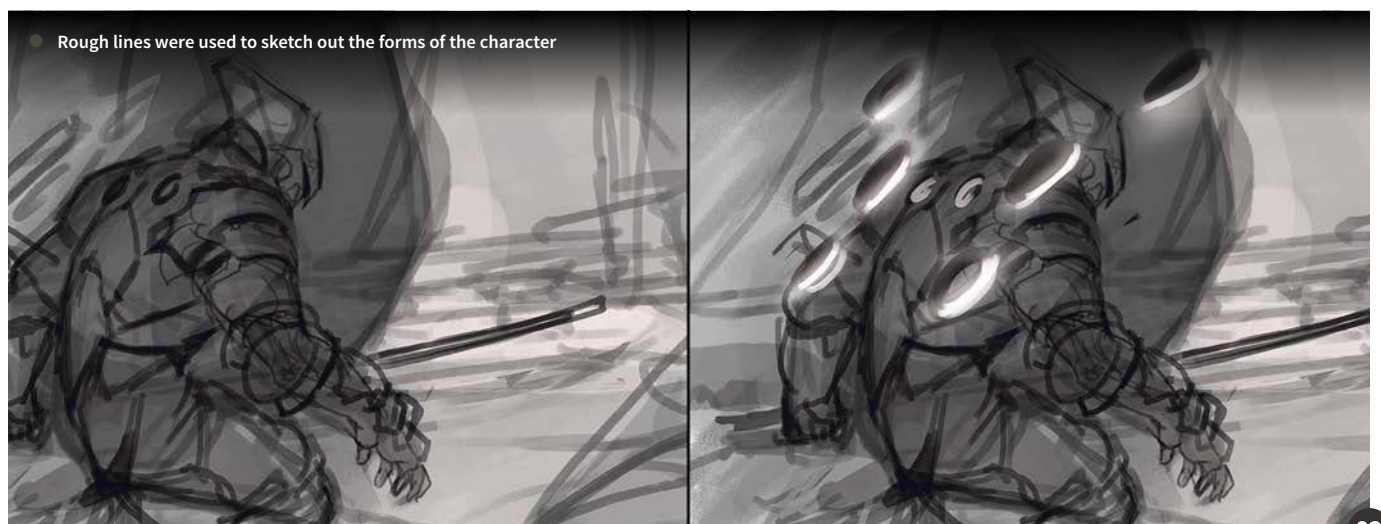canvas which is crucial for any illustration. I centered my character on the rule of thirds and used a simple triangle composition to outline the body and weapon of a seraph. For this painting in particular I wanted my character's pose to capture a bit of motion and the weight of his armor.

02 **Rough silhouette lines:** After I was satisfied with the gesture sketch I moved on to drawing rough lines. The purpose of this step was to start defining the major shapes within the character's silhouette. As before, the sketch was pretty messy with stray lines in addition to the major shapes I had decided on beforehand. Sometimes these stray lines can help generate unique designs that I wouldn't have thought of otherwise.

Before starting this piece I already had a strong vision of how I wanted the glowing back rings to look, so I quickly mocked-up the rings on a separate layer to make sure they would fit in the image and work with the current composition. The glowing effect for

Establishing the gesture and composition of the image first

01

Rough lines were used to sketch out the forms of the character

02

the rings was made by using a square brush with white, followed by a low opacity Airbrush using Linear Dodge mode. Once the key visual elements and major shapes were mapped out in this stage, I moved on to adding values.

> "I placed my light source at the upper-left side of the image to have the dark shadow values contrast with, and emphasize, the flaming sword"

03 **Form and light direction:** I created a new layer and started painting in values underneath the rough lines layer. In this image most of the armor wrapped around the forms in a circular fashion, so I used a soft Airbrush which allowed me to make quick gradations when blocking-in values.

I started by filling the character out with a light base value and then placing the core shadows to establish the main light source. In this piece I placed my light source at the upper-left side of the image to have the dark shadow values contrast with, and emphasize, the flaming sword, which would be painted in later. Generally
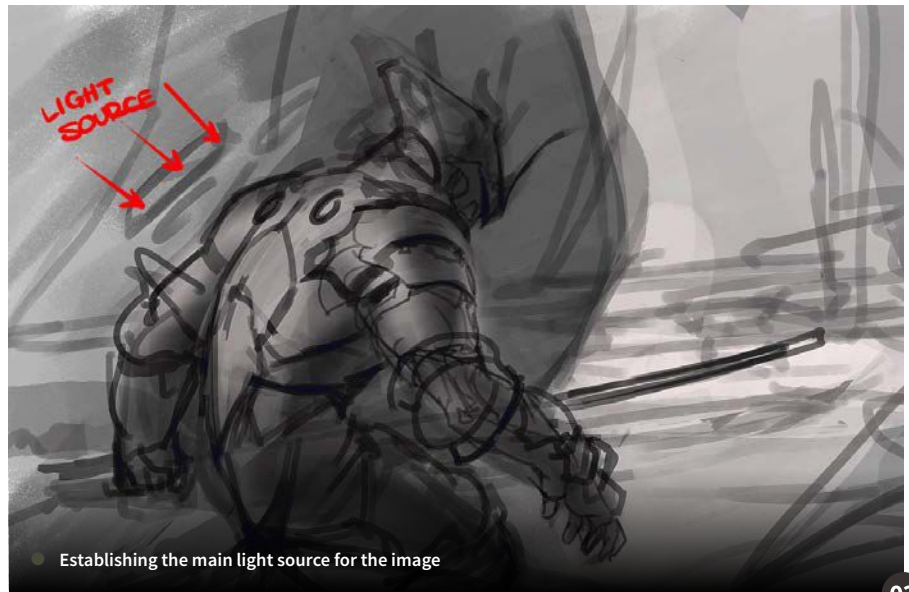
Establishing the main light source for the image

when painting I leave extra light effects and secondary light sources until the end of the process because the 3D form of a character should read well with just the main light source.

04 **Refining forms:** This step is usually the longest part of the process; I was done with rough planning and ready to render for the final image. Once I was satisfied with the overall values, I lowered the opacity of the

rough line layer to about 15% and merged it with the underlying value layer. At this point I had decided to keep the background really simple and just have the character as the focus, so I erased away the stray background lines. While keeping the light direction in mind, I used the Sharp Edge brush to harden cast shadow lines and render out the separations in the armor. I also looked to bring more definition to the character by adding in occlusion shadows. ▶

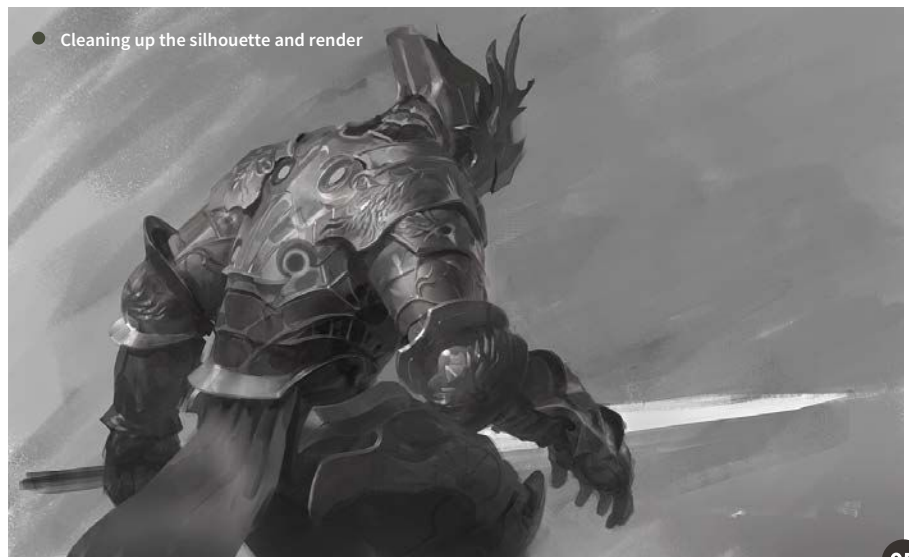Gradually rendering the major forms and starting to think about details

When rendering I like to work part-by-part, starting with the shoulder piece in this case. Each part was done on a new layer and then merged to the main character layer once I was happy with the results. I also used the Eraser tool to cut away at the contours of the seraph so I could have a clean silhouette. At the end of this step the volume, separations and overlaps of the major shapes were clear.

05 **The first detail pass:** After the major forms were rendered out, I started working on extra details. I stuck with feather shaped engravings on the armor to capture the essence of an angelic warrior. I also painted in armor ribs to cross-contour the form. For the back piece of armor I added two extra circle indents that would serve as "sockets" for the glowing rings later on. I also started to clean up and render out any leftover guidelines that I had used for details. I then prepared for my next detail pass and used a hard-edged Texture brush to rough out the shape of the sword in white, and fill out a cloth ready for patterns.
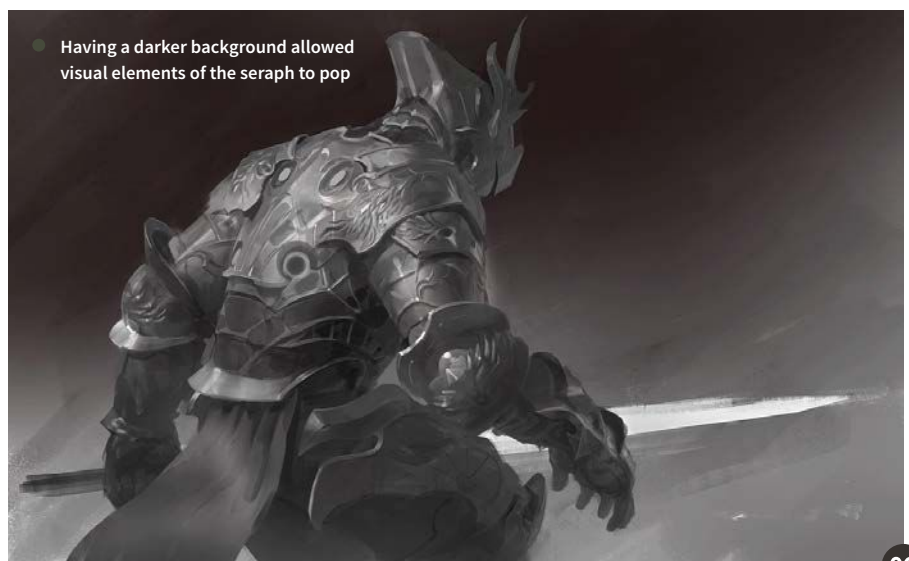
> "The dark background gave me the contrast I needed to play with blending options when adding in light effects"

06 **The background:** When I had finished rendering the values and details of my character, I moved on to the background. In this image I took the simple route with a fairly dark gradient made with soft, blurry brushstrokes. The dark background gave me the contrast I needed to play with blending options when adding in light effects, and also drew attention to the character. In order to ground the character in the scene, I used a soft brush to lighten the values below the waist which merged him with the atmosphere.
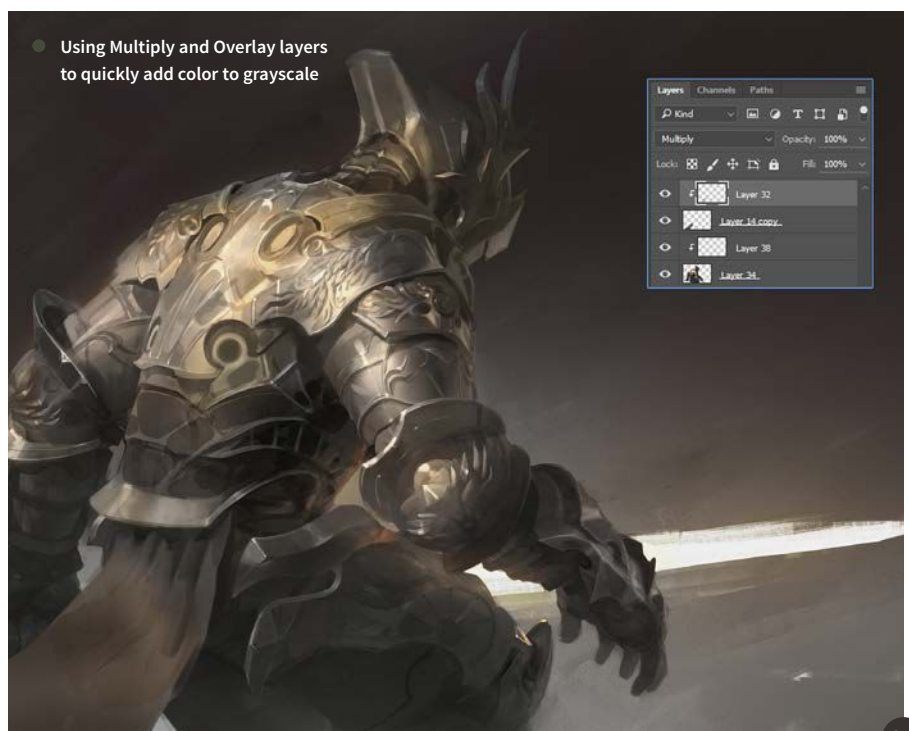
07 **Initial colors:** Before applying color I copied all the character layers then merged them as a duplicate layer that I could work on. That gave me a backup in case I needed to reverse any changes. After making a duplicate, I created two new layers (one set to blending mode Multiply and another set to Overlay) and added them as clipping masks to the duplicate character layer. These clipping mask layers allowed me to adjust the color without disrupting the character layer.

Cleaning up the silhouette and render

05

Having a darker background allowed visual elements of the seraph to pop

06

Using Multiply and Overlay layers to quickly add color to grayscale
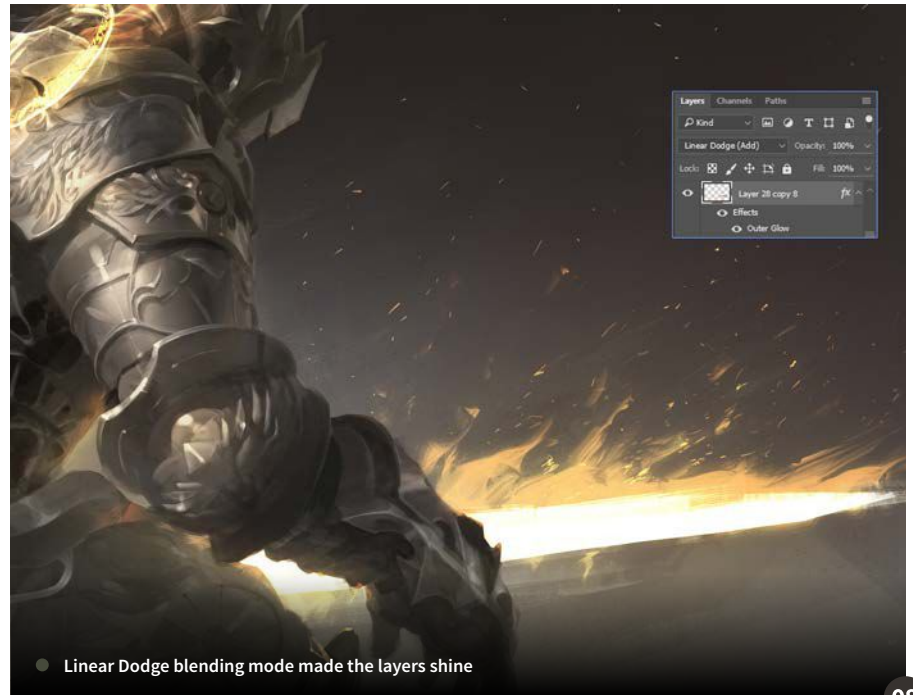
07

I went for a golden color for the armor so I used an Airbrush on a low opacity to lightly brush yellow and orange hues on the Multiply and Overlay layers. I also created a quick glow for the sword using a light orange Airbrush on Linear Dodge mode.

08 Flames: To create the flame effects for the sword I made a new layer with a Linear Dodge blending mode and set the brush mode to Color Dodge. For the flames I used a feather brush since its shape dynamics gave me organic curves and sharp details. I then used a hard round brush to draw sparks coming from the sword in order to add visual noise to the background. After finishing the sparks and flames I added an outer-glow layer style set to Color Dodge mode with a light yellow base to give the flame layer a brighter shine.

> **"After I had finished painting in the rings I set the layer blending mode to Color Dodge. This let me show off more saturated colors on the underlying layers"**

09 Rings: For the back rings I created a new layer with the same outer-glow style as the flames. I detailed the rings with the same color scheme as the armor and used the feather brush to paint in the wisps of light connecting each ring. After I had finished painting in the rings I set the layer blending mode to Color Dodge. This let me show off more saturated colors on the underlying layers as opposed to Linear Dodge which I just used for shine.
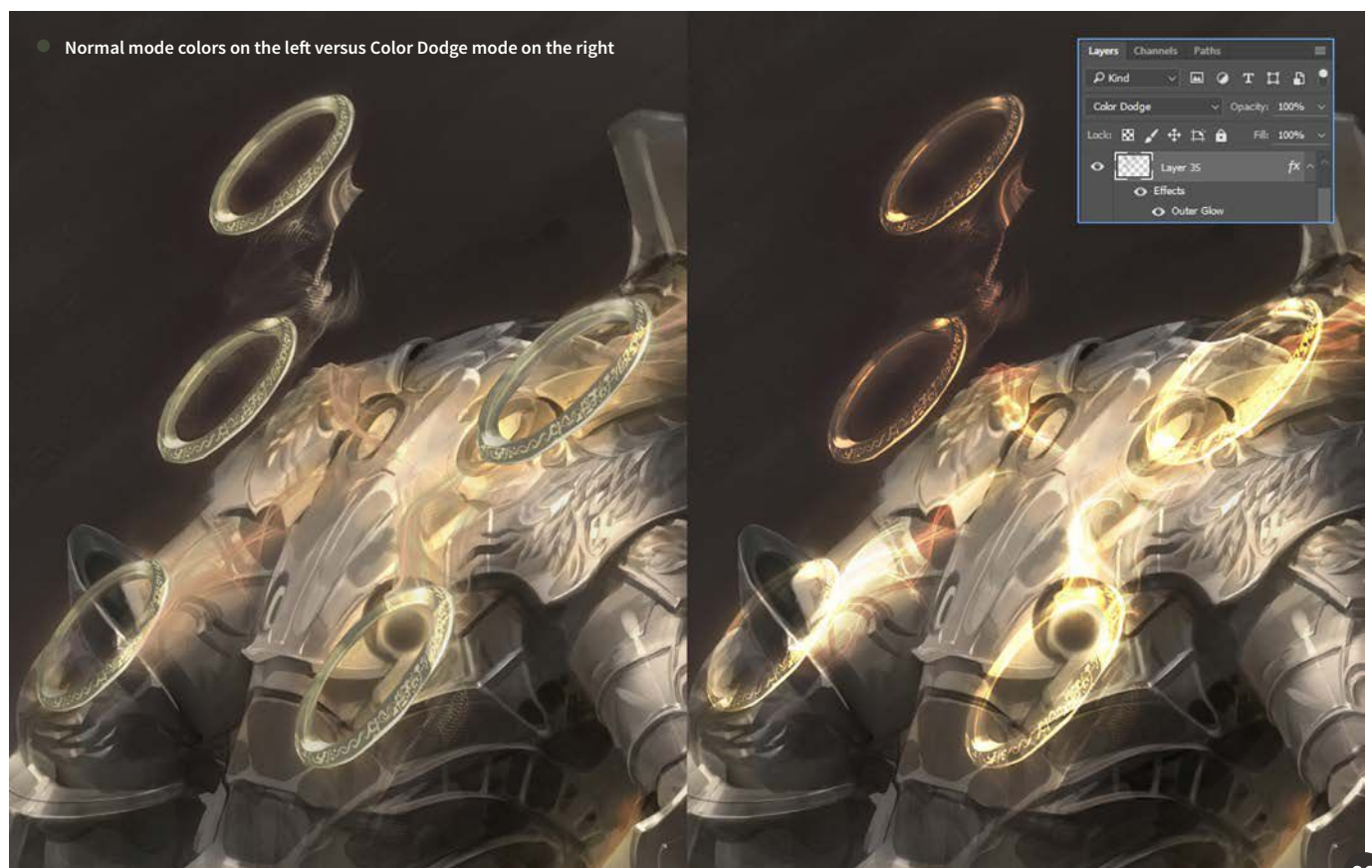
10 Finishing touches: Once the extra light effects and color layers were finished I did a final clean-up pass. I added rim lights produced by the flaming sword and drew a cross pattern onto the back cloth. As a final step I then merged all the layers into a final copy and used the Sharpen tool on focal points such as the rings and the pauldrons. ●

Linear Dodge blending mode made the layers shine
08

Normal mode colors on the left versus Color Dodge mode on the right
09

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